

# **Fairbury History Stories Volume 2**

by

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Fairbury History Stories Volume 2  
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## **Foreword**

The first settlers in the Fairbury area was Major Darnell south of town in 1829 and the McDowells north of town in 1832. In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad installed new tracks which helped to create the village of Fairbury.

This book is a collection of over 70 different carefully researched stories about various aspects of Fairbury history. These stories run the range from the pioneer settlers to modern efforts to preserve Fairbury history.

It is hoped this book will help people better understand the almost 200 years of rich history that helped to define the community of Fairbury.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks go to the Dominy Memorial Library for digitizing the Blade newspaper and making it available online. These archives are the primary source of information for these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Their collection was often used to research and to develop these Fairbury history stories.

Thanks also go to Diane Pawlowski for her assistance in researching the many topics covered in this book

Many thanks also go to Judith K. Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Book Design**

The author began writing Fairbury history stories for the Blade newspaper in 2018. A maximum limit of 1,000 words were placed on these articles by the editor. There was a limit of two photographs or images per article. The vast majority of the articles only used one image to accompany each article.

With the 1,000 word limit, it was impractical to specifically cite each reference source that was used for every article. If the source was the Blade or the Pantagraph, the author often cited the publication and what year the article was found.

For this book, the text that was used in the original Blade article was repeated in this book. If more photographs or images are available for an article, they were added to the content of this book.

Most newspaper stories are written such that the first paragraph is designed to grab the reader's attention so they will read the whole article. These history stories are not written in this format. Because these are history stories, they are generally written in chronological order. Often, the family tree of a person back to Europe is the introduction of each story. The author believes this format is less confusing to the reader versus mixing chronological events within a story.

### **Errors**

The author has made every attempt to be as accurate as possible with the data used in this book. Some of this data came from Ancestry.com. The danger of using data from Ancestry.com is that it is often not verifiable to a source document.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Fairbury Household Life in the 1880s**

Many women today live very hectic lives. In addition to taking care of their family, they often work outside the home. Some women often wish for a simpler time when women did not have to work outside the home.

Alma Lewis James was a Fairbury historian who wrote the book *Stuff Clubs & Antimacassars*. She extensively studied Fairbury home life between the years of 1857 and 1900. She also drew upon the experience of her mother, Ella Beach Lewis (1862 - 1939), about household life in the 1880s in Fairbury. Alma's book recounts what household life was like in Fairbury in the 1880s.

In the winter months, the children would undress next to the heating stove before venturing into their frigid beds for the night. They would take hot bricks wrapped in wool cloths to keep them company during the night.

Before going to bed, the wife would make sure to leave enough water on the stove to keep warm during the night. In the morning, the water hand pump would be frozen. The wife would use the hot water to get the frozen pump unthawed and working again.

The wife would then wake up the children so they could get to school on time. The children would get dressed next to the warmth of the stove. The children had to be careful and not stand too close to the stove. If they stood too close, they could receive a burn.

If the children complained about the cold weather, their mother would give them the "pioneer lecture." She would tell them the early pioneers had cold winds whistling through the cracks of their log cabin. Each morning, the man of the house had to sweep the snow out of the room. After he swept out the snow, he had to build a fire in the fireplace.

After the children were off to school, the wife would do her daily household activities. Her first daily chore was to bring every lamp and

lantern into the kitchen that was used the day before. She would refill each lantern, trim the wicks, and wash and polish the glass chimneys.

The ice delivery man would deliver a new block of ice and place it in her icebox. The wife would have to empty the pan, which held the water melted from the ice. The milk delivery man would deliver milk each day. She would place the empty bottles on the porch and put the new bottles in the icebox.

When the pantry was low on food, she would go to one of the many small grocery stores and purchase food to keep her pantry stocked. Then she would start on her daily house cleaning chores.

Clothes were washed by hand using a corrugated scrub board. In the summer months, the washed clothing was hung outside on the line to dry. In the winter months, the washed clothing was hung on a line strung behind the stove. Sometimes it took all week for the family's clothing to finally dry. During the winter months, a visitor to the house got to see the family's undergarments on full display while they were drying.

At the end of a school day, she would prepare supper for the family on the coal-fired cast iron stove. After serving food, the cooking utensils and plates were washed. Most kitchens had a wood board floor. Linoleum flooring had not been invented yet. Consequently, many a woman scrubbed her kitchen floor on her hands and knees every day after dinner, except Sunday.

Most families bathed every Saturday night in the kitchen. First, the supper dishes were done, and the kitchen straightened. The husband then built up a good fire in the stove. He placed pots and kettles of water on the stove to heat. The wooden tub was then brought to the kitchen. A rag rug was placed on the floor next to the wooden tub as a bath mat. The soap, washcloths, and towels were placed on a chair within reach. Beginning with the littlest, the children were thoroughly scrubbed down. A bath was to get clean, not just to keep clean, and no corners were overlooked. With the children in fresh nightgowns and tucked into bed, it was time for more hot water and the grownups to take their turns bathing.



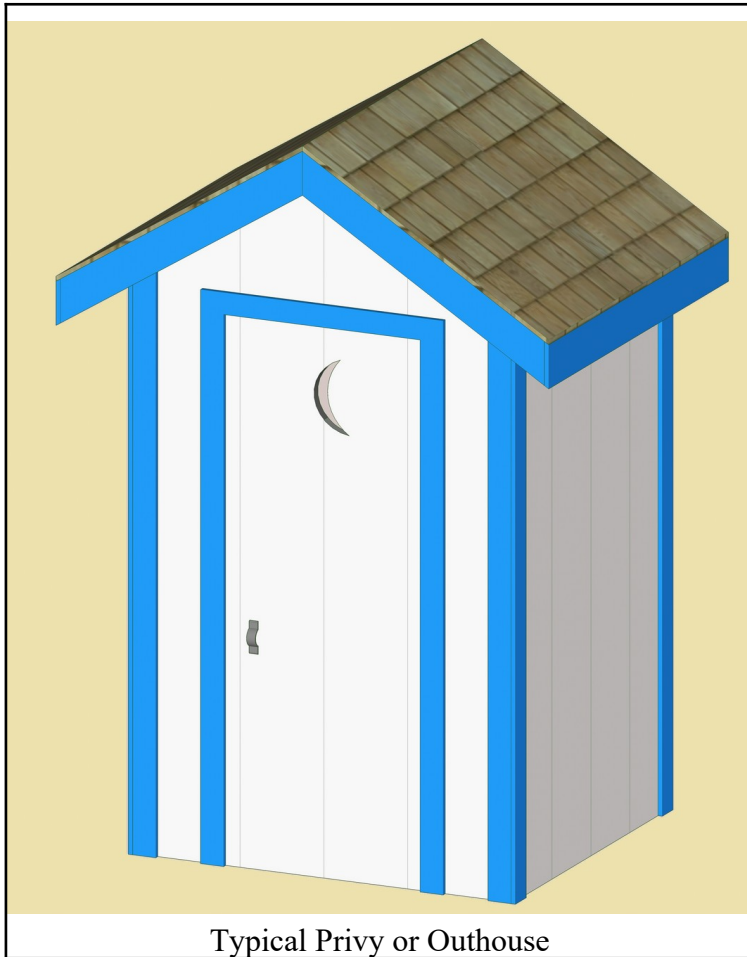
Twice a year, the wife would undertake a massive cleaning of the entire house. These extensive cleanings were performed in the spring and fall. Homes in the 1880s usually had massive room size carpets. Twice a year, the husband would move the furniture, then take the carpets outside and hang them on a wire line. If a son of the right age was available, his job was to clean the carpets by beating them.

The wife would then inspect each carpet for moths. Moths were often found where the seldom moved furniture was located. After the carpets were cleaned, the woman would hand rub salt and pepper into the carpet edges to deter moths.

The lace window curtains came down, and they were all washed. They were then fitted onto big wooden stretchers to dry them. The stretchers usually stood on the porch. All of the bedroom closets and drawers were emptied and inspected for moths. The clothing was then cleaned and aired. The clean clothing was packed away in newspapers and mothballs.

Most Fairbury homes did not have indoor bathrooms. Each house had an outhouse. The most common privy size was a "three holer." One of them was reduced in size and built lower than the others to fit the smaller youngsters. There were no windows, but there were ventilators up near the roof. Diamonds and crescents were the popular shapes for these vents. The door opened in, so it could be pushed shut with a foot if someone came. There was no toilet paper. Instead, there was a box for the corn cobs and a hook for the catalog.

Although household life may seem hectic today, in many ways, life is much easier today than back in the 1880s. Now we have all the amenities of indoor plumbing, central heating, air conditioning, electric lighting, and many household labor-saving appliances.



Typical Privy or Outhouse

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Prominent Businessman Frank Churchill**

The parents of Francis "Frank" L. Churchill (1860-1920) were Ebenezer D. Churchill and Hanna L. Atkins. Their family had five children. When he was five years old, his parents moved the family to Chenoa. After graduating from the Chenoa schools, Frank attended the University of Illinois in Urbana. After he finished his college education, he took a job with the S. C. Bartlett Grain Company. He traveled for this firm throughout Central Illinois. Frank then started his own grain business company in Carlock, Illinois. After operating the grain business in Carlock for four years, Frank moved to Fairbury in 1890.

Frank took over the grain business elevator complex in Fairbury at the southeast corner of Locust and First Streets. He operated this grain business for more than twenty years.

In 1893, at the age of thirty-three, he married Miss Lilly McDowell of Fairbury. She was the daughter of James McDowell and Frances Wilson.

In addition to the grain elevator business, Frank also owned and operated the Churchill quarry. This quarry was on the west side of First Street, just south of the Vermilion River. Gravel from this quarry was used to improve dirt roads into graveled roads throughout Livingston County. A small pond is the only remnant of this quarry today.

The Churchill's built a beautiful new home at the northwest corner of Maple and Second Streets. This home still stands today. The Churchill's had three sons. Fred Weaver Churchill was born in 1896, Woodford M. Churchill was born in 1897, and James Delos Churchill was born in 1899. The Churchill's also had two daughters. Mildred was born in 1899, and Hannah F. was born in 1901.

Frank was very involved with projects to improve the quality of life for citizens of Fairbury. In 1902, Frank, along with other prominent businessmen of Fairbury, decided a new and larger opera house was needed in Fairbury. The old 1870 opera house was now more than thirty years old and had outlived its usefulness. In 1903, Frank started a stock

subscription drive to raise funds to build a new opera house. He was able to raise \$8,500 towards building a new opera house in just a few weeks. This initial high level of interest in building a new opera house prompted other businessmen to support the project. This led to the Third Street Central Opera House being completed in 1904.

Frank was also deeply interested in Fairbury public schools. For almost twenty years, he served as an official of the Fairbury school systems. He first served as President of the city school system. It was he who first saw the need for a new township high school. Frank led the effort to build the new township high school in 1914. Frank then became the first school board President of the new high school.

Frank also served several terms as a member of the Fairbury City Council. He led the effort to get Main Street paved. He also was involved with projects to drain city streets.

Frank's son, Fred Weaver Churchill, served in World War I. While in a 1918 battle in France, he was the subject of an attack from the enemy using deadly mustard gas. Fred survived the initial mustard gas attack and returned to Fairbury. Fred never really recovered from the mustard gas attack and died in Fairbury in 1924 at age 27.

In 1920, at age 59, Frank Churchill encountered a health issue. He decided to have an operation in a Peoria hospital before his ailment became too advanced to treat. He was still in relatively good health. Frank did well during the first operation. He then had a second operation the following week. Five minutes after completion of the second operation, his heart failed, and Frank died. His death was a surprise to his family since he had done well after the first operation.

Frank's death came as a major blow to Fairbury citizens. He was a leading businessman with his grain elevator and gravel quarry businesses. He was also a civic leader because of his success in building the new Third Street opera house, improving the drainage of city streets, and building the new township high school. On the afternoon of his funeral, both the schools and businesses were closed in honor of Frank Churchill.

After Frank died in 1920, son James Delos Churchill continued to operate the gravel quarry north of Fairbury. In 1928, James was involved with an incident that today we would call "road rage." In that era of gravel roads and narrow roads, the convention was for automobiles to give the right-of-way to horse-drawn transport wagons. One day, James was hauling a heavy load of gravel from the quarry using a horse-drawn wagon. He encountered a car with one male and three female passengers. All the occupants in the car were African Americans. The vehicle refused to give his heavy wagon the right-of-way. Words were exchanged, and the car went around the wagon and went to Fairbury. The male driver and one of the female passengers then returned to the site, and the male driver shot James Delos Churchill dead. The male driver and female passenger were arrested, convicted, and served time in prison for the murder.

The third brother, Woodford M. Churchill, lived a relatively normal life and died in 1996. Most members of the Churchill family are buried in the Avoca Cemetery, north of Fairbury. The Churchill family played a vital role in improving Livingston County roads and improving the quality of life for Fairbury citizens. The only physical remnants of the Churchill family are the quarry pond by the Vermilion River and their family home at the northwest corner of Maple and Second Streets.



Frank L. Churchill Residence at the Northwest Corner of  
Maple and Second Streets

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Fairbury's Zouave Cadets**

John S. Scibird was born in Fountain County, Indiana, in 1830. His family eventually moved to Bloomington, Illinois. John married Miss Lydia A. Underwood from Ohio. He owned and operated a photography business in Bloomington. John and his wife had eight children. The oldest child was a son, Joseph H. Scibird, who was born in 1840.

In the years following the War of 1812, many northern states discontinued their militias. In their place, units of volunteer militia organized themselves. These units, often drawn from members of society, elected their officers, adopted their own uniforms and customs, and generally financed themselves. Well-drilled and commanded units could petition for recognition by their state government. If their state government approved the petition, their officers would be issued commissions by the Governor. The troops were also permitted access to the state's armories and munitions stores, all while maintaining their otherwise independent character. Nevertheless, such volunteer militia companies of this period – despite forming a nucleus around which a state could build and expand its military forces in an emergency – are characterized by historians as "more fraternal than martial." They placed greater emphasis on drill and ceremony than on battlefield tactics.

The National Guard Cadets of Chicago was formed as a volunteer militia company on March 19, 1856, under commanding officer Captain Joseph R. Scott. After three years, however, its strength sat at just fifteen men.

Elmer Ellsworth, the commander of the Rockford Grey's militia company, took a different approach with his volunteer militia. Ellsworth had previously been informed about the French Zouave military customs by his fencing instructor, Doctor Charles A. De Villiers. Mr. Ellsworth introduced his Rockford men to drills inspired by those used by the French Zouave units.

In 1859, the Chicago National Guard cadets saw the Rockford unit perform their Zouave inspired drills. They were so impressed with the uniforms and the drill performance that they offered Elmer Ellsworth immediate command of their Chicago unit. Elmer accepted the offer and took over the Chicago unit. He renamed it the United States Zouave Cadets.

On July 4, 1859, the United States Zouave Cadets – now 46 members strong – first publicly appeared in their new Zouave uniforms and executed the unique Franco-Algerian Zouave drill in front of Chicago's Tremont Hall. With a training schedule of three evenings per week, the United States Zouave Cadets established a reputation for parade ground excellence. One observer described their drill performance as "unsurpassed this side of West Point." The United States Zouave Cadets saw their biggest audience, estimated to be 70,000 in number, the following September. This vast audience was attending the seventh annual United States Agricultural Society Fair in Chicago.

The popularity of the Chicago Zouave Cadets prompted the creation of Zouave cadet units across the United States. A Bloomington Zouave Cadet group was formed. Joseph H. Scibird became their recruiting officer.

The Civil War started on April 12, 1861, when the Confederates bombarded Union soldiers at Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

In June of 1862, Joseph H. Scibird's Zouave cadet unit went to Springfield and became part of the 19th Illinois Infantry Regiment. Joseph rose to the rank of Major in the Union army during the war. Near the end of the war, he married Frances Clark. After the war, Joseph returned to living in Bloomington.

In 1876, John S. Scibird moved to Fairbury and bought the Blade newspaper. His son, Joseph, also moved to Fairbury. Joseph and Frances Scibird had one son, Albert Clark Scibird, born in 1869. Albert was nicknamed Bertie Scibird.

Joseph H. Scibird formed the Fairbury Zouave Cadets. This unit was a group of forty boys who were ten to fourteen years old. Their uniforms consisted of red pants, blue shirts, red caps with blue tops, white stockings,



and shoes. They had toy guns made under the direction of Major Scibird. The toy guns had pine stocks and tin barrels. Major Scibird's son Bertie was a Private in this group.

The Fairbury Zouave Cadets performed drill exercises at Fairbury public events. They performed at the Fairbury Fair. In October of 1878, Governor Shelby M. Cullom gave a speech at Fairbury. The Zouave Cadets performed a drill exercise for the Illinois Governor.

In 1878, the author of a new Livingston County history book, William Le Baron, was performing research for the new book in the Fairbury area. He was so impressed by the Zouave Cadets he made mention of them in his new history book. Le Baron included the names and ranks of all forty boys that served in the Zouave Cadet unit.

Unfortunately, there are no known photographs of the Fairbury Zouave Cadet unit. They must have been very impressive to see in their colorful French Zouave style uniforms. The uniforms of the Fairbury unit were probably as bright as the uniforms of the Chicago Zouave unit. Colorized photographs of the Chicago Zouave cadet unit have survived and are available for review.

Major Joseph H. Scibird died at age forty-nine in 1889. He had severe asthma in the last few years of his life. He was buried in Bloomington's cemetery.

The historian, Le Baron, noted the Fairbury Zouave Cadets performed their drill exercises with perfect military precision. He recounted that older soldiers could learn much from their maneuvers. Le Baron pointed out the country need not fear a danger from either an enemy from home or abroad because of how well prepared the young men were to become great soldiers.



Typical Colorful Zouave Cadet Uniforms

## Fairbury Zouave Cadets (1878)

J. H. Scibird, Captain.  
Thomas Baker, First Lieutenant.  
Willie Van Doorn, Second Lieutenant.  
Charley Rettenmayer, First Sergeant.  
Harmon Gillett, Second Sergeant.  
Fred Baker, Third Sergeant.  
Frank Duell, Fourth Sergeant.  
Fred Wright, Fifth Sergeant.

### CORPORALS.

Grant McDowell.	Thos. Langabeer.
George Decker.	Henry Sweet.
Clarence Murdock.	Bruce Ambury.
Eddie Smith.	Robby Mack.

### PRIVATES.

Adams, Willie.	Jones, Jasper.	Morris, Charley.
Bartlett, Harry.	Kinnear, Charley.	Nichols, Earl.
Baker, George.	Knight, Henry.	Stafford, Malcom.
Burrell, U. S.	McDowell, Charley	Scouler, Tommie.
Bryant, Willie.	McKiernan, Frank.	Scibird, Bertie.
Cramer, Willie.	McDowell, John.	Wright, Harry.
Gardner, Walter.	McCurdy, Dan.	Wright, Frank.
Hurdle, Henry.	McLean, Wilmer.	Westervelt, Emery.
Jones, Willie.	McCurdy, Jacob.	



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Fairbury Historian and Native American Artifact Collector**

Nicklaus Nussbaum and Anna Barbara Fluckiger were both born in Switzerland. They married in Switzerland and started their family. They moved their family from Switzerland to the Metamora, Illinois, area in the early 1860s. In the Fall of 1868, they moved from Metamora to the Fairbury area. They bought a farm which was on the southeast quarter of section 13 in Indian Grove Township, three and one-half miles southeast of Fairbury.

In 1868, there was no Apostolic Christian church nearby in Fairbury. The only church services of their faith were conducted at "North Side" homes in the region of section 21 in Pleasant Ridge Township. The Nussbaum family had to take a horse-drawn wagon eight miles to the church to attend church services. Nicklaus Nussbaum was a relatively poor farmer and did not own a wagon. On Sundays, Nicklaus would borrow a neighbor's wagon to take his family to church services.

One of Nicklaus Nussbaum's many children was Samuel Nussbaum. He was born in Switzerland in 1849 and traveled with his parent's family to the Fairbury farm in 1868. In 1877, when he was 27 years old, he married Christina Ursula Stortz. She was born in 1855 in Baden, Germany. Samuel Nussbaum farmed in the Fairbury area, and he died in 1931. In his will, Samuel left \$500 to the Christian Apostolic Church of Fairbury. This gift would be equivalent to \$7,800 in today's dollars.

Benjamin "Ben" Nussbaum was one of Samuel and Christina's children. He was born in 1892 in Forrest, Illinois. On Good Friday in 1898, when Ben was just six years old, he found his first Native American artifact in a Fairbury farm field. The discovery of this artifact started a life-long interest in searching and finding Native American objects. Ben also became interested in local Apostolic Christian genealogical history.

In 1917, at age 24, Ben married Ruth Marguerite Zook. They began farming and had their only child, Wilmer C. Nussbaum, in 1920. Unfortunately, Ruth Nussbaum died in 1929 at only 36 years of age. She died of double-pneumonia at the Fairbury hospital. After her death, Ben had to raise his nine-year-old son Wilmer by himself.

When Ben was 48 years old in 1941, he married Lydia E. Munz. At some point, they moved to a house located on South Fifth Street in Fairbury. After Ben retired from farming, he became the Superintendent of the Fairbury Water Works.

The first humans to populate North America crossed from Asia to Alaska about 10,000 years ago when the Ice Age ended. These peoples eventually found their way to Illinois. As a result, artifacts from these peoples range from 500 to 10,000 years old in the Fairbury area. These artifacts were first discovered by the pioneering farmers who settled around Fairbury. These artifacts will continue to be found for many more hundreds of years because there were so many of them.

The hobby of collecting artifacts from these early peoples hit a peak in the Fairbury area in the 1940s. Ben Nussbaum, along with his brother-in-law Edgar Zook, formed the Fairbury Archaeology Society by 1941. This society had ten members. They studied Native American history in the cold winter months and went on field trips in the warmer summer months. Other members of this club were Burbon Downing and Wade Simmons.

Ben Nussbaum joined the Illinois State Archaeological Society and the Ohio State Archaeological Society. He served as treasurer of the Illinois State Archaeological Society for many years.

In August of 1941, the Illinois State Archaeological Society asked the Fairbury Archaeological Society, to host a meeting of the state-wide group at Pontiac, Illinois. The Fairbury group set up the meeting and exhibited many of the artifacts found in the Fairbury area.

Ben Nussbaum became famous for his bannerstone collection. Bannerstones are characterized by a centered hole in a symmetrically shaped carved or ground stone. The holes are typically one-quarter to three-quarters of an inch in diameter and extend through a raised portion

centered in the rock. They usually are bored all the way through the stone. Some bannerstones have been found with holes that extend only part of the way through. Many are made from banded slate or other colored hard stone. They often have a geometric "wing nut" or "butterfly" shape but are not limited to these. More than just functional artifacts, bannerstones are a form of art that appear in varying shapes, designs, and colors, symbolizing their ceremonial and spiritual importance.

Archaeologists are still trying to determine why ancient peoples made these unusual stones. They may have only been used for ceremonies versus a practical usage. Artifact collectors developed the nickname "Bannerstone Ben" for Ben Nussbaum because of his extensive collection of bannerstones. Ben Nussbaum stored his artifacts in the basement of his Fifth Street home.

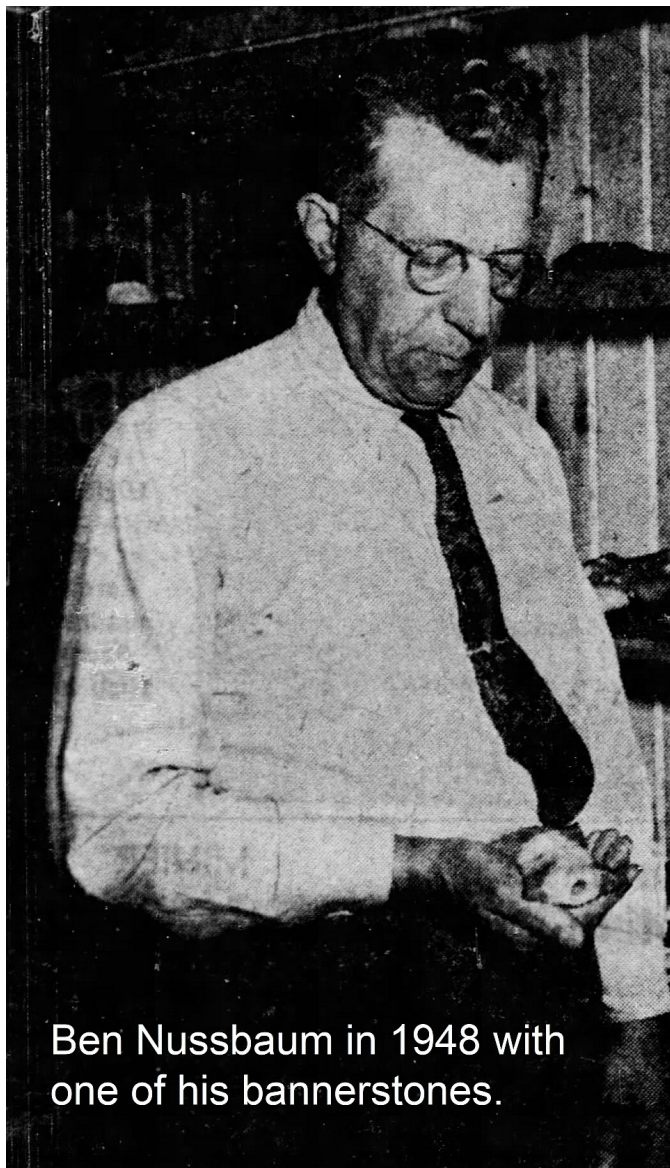
In 1959, Ben Nussbaum wrote a book titled Nussbaum's: Being An Account Of Nicklaus and Anna Barbara Fluckiger Nussbaum And Their Descendants. It is a fascinating account of his grandfather Nicklaus working in Switzerland and deciding to move to America.

Ben Nussbaum also became very interested in the family genealogies of early members of the Apostolic Christian Church. In 1973, he published his pamphlet about the South Side Apostolic Church history. In 1975, he published another pamphlet about the North Side Apostolic Church history.

Prior to Ben researching and publishing his history pamphlets, the only written source of Fairbury area Apostolic Christian Church history is Perry Klopfenstein's 1984 Marching to Zion book. Klopfenstein's book only dedicated a few pages to the Fairbury and Forrest North and South Side Churches. Ben's South Side Church history is 66 pages long, and his North Side Church history is 31 pages.

Benjamin Nussbaum died in 1975. One of his legacies is the stories and photographs of his Native American artifact collection preserved in newspapers and state archaeological societies. His 1959 book about the family history of Nicklaus Nussbaum and his early years in Fairbury is another of his legacies. His 1973 and 1975 Apostolic Christian Church histories are still being used today by genealogical researchers. Both his

1959 book and the Apostolic Church histories are available from the web site [Archive.Org](http://Archive.Org).



Ben Nussbaum in 1948 with  
one of his bannerstones.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Water Fluoridation Was a Controversial Issue**

In 1945, a group of Evanston, Illinois, public officials met and decided they wanted to run an experiment on public water fluoridation. Some previous studies had indicated the addition of fluorine resulted in a reduction in cavities for children by two-thirds. The Illinois Department of Health decided to subsidize the cost of the experiment.

The first step was to survey and record the condition of all the children's teeth in Evanston before fluoridation was implemented. In 1947, fluorine was added to the Evanston public drinking water. After fluoridation was implemented, the children's teeth were surveyed again. This study found a significant reduction in children's cavities. Chicago, and nearby towns, began to implement public water fluoridation programs.

In 1950, the Fairbury P.T.A. suggested to the Fairbury City Council that fluorine be added to the water system. The City Council rejected this suggestion because the technology was still too new. In March of 1955, the Citizens Committee on Fluoridation, headed by Reverend John Foss, requested the City Council approve adding sodium fluoride to the drinking water. City officials responded by saying they felt this decision lay with the voters. The City Council voted to put the fluoridation question on the April 19, 1955 ballot. The measure would be whether the city should add 1.5 parts per million of sodium fluoride to the Fairbury water system.

After this City Council meeting, the Fairbury Committee for Fluoridation had a meeting to outline a program to obtain a favorable majority on the April 19, 1955, vote. The March 17, 1955, Blade had a front-page story titled Fluoride Would Not Be New. The Fairbury Committee for Fluoridation lobbied that the addition of fluoride in the water supply would reduce tooth decay in children.

Reverend John Foss, chairman of the group, recounted that Fairbury's water supply already contained one-tenth parts per million. He stated that studies had shown the fluorine content needed to be a minimum of one full

part per million. The Reverend said chlorine is already added to the water, and fluorine should be added to bring it to the proper level.

The next part of this Blade article relied on testimony from Dr. D. H. Johnston, Fairbury dentist. Dr. Johnston recounted that Fairbury changed its water supply in 1935. Before 1935, Fairbury water had a higher concentration of fluorine. After the new wells were sunk south of town in 1935, that water source had less fluorine. Dr. Johnston said he found a distinct difference in the teeth of children depending on which water supply they were raised with. The children raised on pre-1935 water had fewer decayed or missing teeth than children raised on the post-1935 water supply.

The Blade article also reported that many area towns had natural fluorine content at or above the recommended 1.0 parts per million. Odell had 3.5 parts per million fluorides, which was 3.5 times the recommended level. Odell citizens who drank this water seemed to be as normal as Fairbury citizens. The Joliet water supply was at 1.0 parts per million, the same level that Fairbury would be if fluorine were added.

A dental study was done comparing Joliet children's teeth to Quincy children, which had no fluorine. The Quincy children had three times the amount of decayed, filled, or missing teeth than the Joliet children. Based on this study, Quincy voted to add fluoride to their water at an average cost of seven cents per person per year.

In the same Blade article, Reverend Foss announced that educational materials on fluoridation were being sent to every family in town. The Reverend said that if people did not have time to study the documents, they could rely on the fact that every dentist and doctor in Fairbury supported fluoridating the drinking water.

Two weeks after the Blade article supporting fluoridation was published, the anti-fluoridation group ran an ad with the headline "Doctor Says Fluorides Are Not Safe." The advertisement quoted Dr. Oscar Schneider of Winnetka, a member of the American Medical Association. The ad also stated, "Everybody Who Likes Children Is Gonna Vote No On Fluoridation."

One week later, The Committee for Fluoridation ran an ad in favor of fluoridation. This ad stated every dentist and doctor in Fairbury supported fluoridation. The ad asked the question, "If we can't believe these men, who then can we believe?"

The last issue of the Blade before the fluoridation vote was packed with information for and against fluoridation. Each side had an article and an ad giving their positions. The anti-fluoridation advertisement stated that parents would still take their children to the dentist and have to pay the bill so that costs would be the same. Taxes would have to go up to pay for the machinery to add the fluorine.

The pro-fluoridation ad stated that clothing styles and transportation methods had changed over the last 25 years, so the water system should also be modernized. Their ad said fluoridation was supported by the A.M.A. and all the dentists and doctors in Fairbury.

The big vote was held on April 19, 1955. The measure to add fluoride to the water was defeated 689 to 254. A few years later, the P.T.A.'s in Fairbury, Forrest, and Chatsworth sponsored free dental fluoride treatments to second, fifth, and eighth-grade students. Four treatments per year were required. The student dental fluoride treatments were supervised by Livingston County public health nurse Frances A. Maley.

In 1967, the Illinois legislature passed a law requiring all public water supplies to have the proper level of fluoridation. Fairbury had no choice but to comply with this state law. Current state law still requires appropriate fluoridation levels in all public water systems.

The fluoridation question was one of the most hotly debated issues ever put on the Fairbury ballot. Although fluoridation was rejected by the voters in 1955, just 12 years later, it became state law. Many citizens remember receiving the dental fluoride treatments when they attended Fairbury grade schools.

**DID YOU KNOW THAT**

**EVERY PHYSICIAN AND DENTIST  
IN FAIRBURY FAVORS  
FLUORIDATION**

Why even listen to rumors, theories and opinions when these health specialists, and their professional organizations, have given the program of controlled fluoridation their undivided support and endorsement?



**These men are professionally qualified to evaluate health measures and they support controlled fluoridation.**

Dr. J. H. MacDonald  
Dr. W. A. Marshall  
Dr. F. H. Miller  
Dr. Logan Wilson  
Dr. John Smith

Dr. G. G. Seitman  
Dr. D. H. Johnston  
Dr. J. H. Langstaff  
Dr. H. N. Leonard  
Dr. H. C. Sauer

**IF WE CAN'T BELIEVE THESE MEN,  
WHOM THEN CAN WE BELIEVE?**

Fairbury Committee for Fluoridation

1955

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Tractor Ownership in Early Fairbury**

The 1917 Prairie Farmer's Reliable Directory of Farmers and Breeders in Livingston County gives an exciting glimpse into Fairbury's agricultural history. In 1917, automobiles had been purchased by 132 Fairbury farmers. The adoption rate of tractors for farming was much slower than cars. Horses continued to be used on Fairbury area farms into the 1940s.

In 1917, only nine Fairbury area farmers had purchased tractors. One of these farmers was Samuel Fendrick. Sam Fendrick was born in Switzerland in 1876. He married Alta Rozina Pierce in 1897 in Fairbury. Sam and Alta had two daughters and one son. Sam Fendrick farmed the same farm south of Fairbury for over 50 years. He retired and moved to Fairbury in 1939. Sam died in 1964.

In 1917, Sam owned a Mogul farm tractor. The Mogul 8-16 tractor was built from 1914 to 1917 in the International Harvester Tractor Works, Chicago, Illinois, USA. The Mogul 8-16 was simple, reliable, and maneuverable. It had a sizable single-cylinder engine, and two drive wheels gave it the power and traction to easily handle a two-bottom plow in most soils. Mogul production was 5,111 the first full year and went up from there.

Another early tractor owner was William A. Goembel. He was born in 1876 in Germanville Township. He married Ida M. Younger in 1899. They farmed six miles south of Fairbury. He retired in 1920 and died in 1963.

Mr. Goembel owned a Parrett farm tractor. The Parrett Tractor Company was founded in Ottawa, Illinois, by Henry and Dent Parrett in 1913. The Parrett brothers moved their operation to Chicago in 1915 and had success with the model H 12-25 tractor. Massey-Harris licensed the Parrett design and produced a version of the Parrett tractors under the Massey-Harris name (Models 1, 2, and 3) in Canada. The Parrett could not compete when the Fordson appeared and caused a steep drop in tractor prices. With the canceling of the Massey contract, Parrett stopped production in 1923.

George Nimmo owned a Waterloo tractor in 1917. George was born in Scotland in 1869. He married Nellie Irene Brownson. George was known as one of the most progressive farmers in Livingston County. He pioneered the growing and silo storage of sweet clover. Unfortunately, he was killed in 1932 when a tile fell from the top of a silo and struck him on the head.

After several failures in tractor design, Waterloo introduced the Model R Waterloo Boy. This tractor proved immensely popular, and over eight thousand were sold before the line was discontinued in 1923. The Company also had great success with the Model N, which was introduced in late 1916. Despite the Company's name, both the Model R and Model N burned kerosene for fuel.

By this time, several other companies had begun to build and sell tractors, but the Waterloo Boy was easily one of the most popular. In 1918, Deere & Company, a farm equipment company based in Moline, Illinois, purchased the Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company for \$2,100,000. Deere & Company had been anxious to enter the growing tractor market, but its initial designs had proved unsuccessful. Executives at Deere & Company decided to purchase the Waterloo Gasoline because field tests indicated that the Waterloo Boy tractor had the best performance. After the sale was completed, the Company became known as the John Deere Tractor Company. The tractors produced by the Company continued to be sold under the Waterloo Boy name until 1923 when the John Deere Model D was introduced.

Albert Popejoy was born in 1867, and he farmed south of Fairbury. After he retired from farming, he moved to the LaPorte, Indiana area. Albert died in LaPorte in 1937 and was buried in the Cropsey cemetery. He owned a Mogul farm tractor.

Alexander Steidinger was born in Germany in 1856. He married Sarah Zimmerman at Fairbury. He farmed south of Fairbury. In 1891, Alex went into business for two years with Joseph Swing. They operated a department store in Fairbury on the south side of Locust Street, between Second and Third Streets. Their building advertising sign was repainted recently by the Fairbury Improvement Group. Alex Steidinger died in 1950.

Mr. Steidinger owned a Little Devil tractor manufactured by Hart-Parr. Mr. Hart and Mr. Parr graduated from the University of Wisconsin with degrees in mechanical engineering in June 1896. They received special honors for their thesis on internal combustion engines for which they had designed, built, and tested a stationary 1-cylinder engine. Following graduation, they constructed a small factory in Madison, Wis., and started manufacturing gasoline engines. These engines were very successful. Hart and Parr went on to build agricultural tractors. The Company was merged with three other companies into the Oliver Farm Equipment Company in 1929.

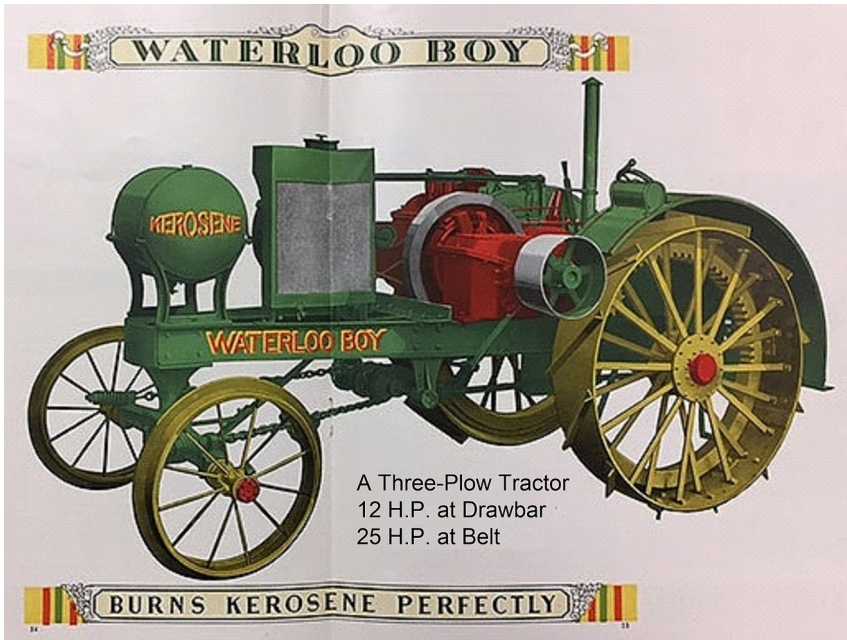
William V. Wilson was born in Indiana in 1876. He married Bessie Hornbeck. William farmed in Fairbury and then moved to Colorado. He died in Colorado in 1961. Mr. Wilson owned a Russell farm tractor in 1917. The Russell Company was an early manufacturer of steam-powered tractors. In 1909, they built their first gasoline-powered tractor. The Company went out of business in 1942.

Leroy Worrick (1878-1943) and brother George W. Worrick (1882-1968) each owned Emerson tractors in 1917. They farmed in Belle Prairie Township, south of Fairbury. The Emerson-Brantingham Co. was one of the early manufacturers of farm equipment. It went out of business in 1928 and was one of the last of the 800 implement companies to fall prey to the times.

DeBold Householder was born in 1883. He married Lottie May Freeman. They farmed in Indian Grove Township, and DeBold died in 1986. Mr. Household owned an 8-16 Avery. The Avery company was based in Peoria, Illinois. They built the model 8-16 from 1916-22. At its height, it called itself "The Largest Tractor Company in the World" and employed 2,600 men. The Company offered a broad line of tractors and engines, ranging from a one-row cultivator to a massive 80 horsepower tractor. The Company went out of business in 1931.

These nine farmers were pioneers concerning making the switch from horses to tractors. Unfortunately, not many of these early tractors survive today. Most of them were very unreliable and were replaced by lower cost

and more reliable models. Many of these first tractors were donated to the World War II scrap metal drives.





## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Fairbury Photographer Ferguson Had Interesting Family Story**

Alexander A. Frerksen was born in 1861 in Germany. He emigrated from Germany to the Moline, Illinois, area around 1870. His first wife was Rena Frerksen. In 1899 in Moline, Alexander sought and received a divorce from Rena. Infidelity was the reason for the divorce.

Mary Frances Fugate (1874-1950) was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1874. She married Charles A. Dangerfield in 1896 in Moline. They had one child, Russell Dangerfield. They then divorced. Alexander Frerksen married Mary Fugate in 1903. Son Russell Dangerfield lived with Alexander and Mary after they married. Three sons were born to Alexander and Mary. They were Holis, Gilbert Clarence, and Walter Alexander Frerksen.

Alexander Frerksen was a well-known businessman in Moline. He initially operated a small popcorn store located in front of his house in downtown Moline. In 1907, Alexander sold the popcorn stand at Sixteenth Street and Third Avenue to Chris Dolan. While the sale was in progress, the old corn popper broke down. Mr. Frerksen took the old popper home and replaced it with another operating one. When the new owner, Mr. Dolan, inspected the popcorn stand, he noticed the old popper had been replaced. Mr. Dolan demanded that Alexander return the old popper. Mr. Frerksen explained the old popper had broke and that he had replaced it with another unit. Mr. Frerksen refused to give the old popcorn popper to Mr. Dolan. The old popper had been purchased in 1900 for \$2.00.

The fight to return the old popper dragged on until each side engaged attorneys. Mr. Dolan filed a civil suit against Alexander for \$10. The Judge allowed for \$1 in damages, and court costs of \$3.60 were assigned to be paid by Alexander. Although Mr. Dolan said the popper was worth \$10 to him, Alexander said it was only worth fifty-cents to him, so he gave it to Mr. Dolan instead of paying him \$1.00. The ownership of the fifty-cent popper was settled at the cost of \$3.60 and attorney's fees.

After selling the popcorn stand, Alexander Frerksen opened another shop that sold cigarettes, smoking tobacco, and fruit. In 1911, burglars broke in and stole most of the store's items, including a box of 250 cigarettes.

Walter and his brother Gilbert decided to try their hand at Vaudeville. Walter played the ukulele, and Gilbert played the banjo. They speculated that Frerksen would not be an acceptable stage name, so they changed their last names to Ferguson. Unfortunately, the name change did not help them become successful in Vaudeville.

By 1935, Walter Ferguson was living in Chicago. In 1936, at the age of 23, Walter married Catherine June Beal in Crown Point, Indiana, just southeast of Chicago. Miss Beal was from Odell, Illinois.

On his World War II draft registration card, Walter indicated that he and his wife Catherine lived at 1940 East 73rd Street in Chicago, Illinois. Walter also was working as a photographer at the Nugent and Graham Studios at 43 East Ohio Street in Chicago.

In the 1940 U.S. Census, Walter reported that he finished the second year of high school. He was employed as a photographer in Chicago and had an annual income of \$1,300. This salary would be equivalent to \$24,040 in today's dollars. While they were living in Chicago, Walter and Catherine had two children, Judith and Leonard Ferguson.

In 1956, Walter and Catherine moved their family from Chicago to Fairbury. Walter wanted to raise his children in a rural community compared to the South Side of Chicago. Walter took a job as a photographer at Record Printing in Fairbury. This company was in the two brick buildings just southwest of Dave's Supermarket. In that era, a significant part of the business of Record Printing was fulfilling the printing needs of Honeggers.

The Ferguson family initially lived in Fairbury. They then moved to a farmhouse owned by Eli Meiss. Son Leonard Ferguson learned how to drive a tractor, disc the fields, bale hay, and haul wagon loads of beans at harvest time.

Two years after moving to Fairbury, daughter Judith Ferguson married William Goembel from Strawn in 1958. She died in June of 2019. Her husband passed away in 2006.

In 1964, Fairbury-Cropsey High School put on a play titled "Time Out for Ginger." Leonard Ferguson acted in this play. Other high school actors included Sally Dowlen, Geoff Victor, Sylvia Miller, Barbara Roth, Claudia Oprondek, John McDonald, James Wall, and Charles Shelby.

Leonard Ferguson left Fairbury in 1965 to join the U.S. Air Force. He got stationed in Hawaii in 1967 and has lived there ever since.

Walter "Wally" Ferguson enjoyed playing golf at the Fairbury Indian Creek Golf Course. Starting in 1962, Walter won several awards at various golfing events.

A historical review of the Blade found that Wally Ferguson was the photographer for at least 17 Fairbury weddings between 1963 and 1970. Between 1961 and 1963, Mrs. Walter Ferguson was recognized in the Blade several times for helping at various Fairbury charity events. Catherine Ferguson worked at Walton's in Fairbury for many years.

In March of 1976, Wally Ferguson made a phone call to the Blade office in Fairbury. He told the Blade that he and Catherine were soon moving to Tucson, Arizona. Wally included his new address in Tucson so Fairbury friends could correspond with them.

Catherine Ferguson died in Tucson, Arizona, in September of 1987. She was 68 years old. Walter Ferguson died in 1995 in Tucson at the age of 82. His wedding photos taken between 1963 and 1970 are still treasured possessions of many Fairbury families.



Alexander A. Frerksen's Confectionery Store Circa 1898. Located at 1514 Fifth Street, Moline, Illinois

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Corn Pickers a Blessing and a Curse for Fairbury Farmers**

Initially, Fairbury farmers harvested their corn by hand. They would detach the corn ears from the stalk and throw them into a wagon. The ears of corn were then stored in a corn crib. The crib had gaps between the wallboards, so air could naturally flow in and dry out the corn. Some of the corn ears were used to feed the farmer's livestock. Sometimes a shelling machine would be contracted for a day. The sheller would remove the kernels from the corn cobs. The grain kernels could then be sold at a local elevator.

Before mechanical harvesting of corn, grain states like Illinois and Iowa would hold hand-picking speed contests. In 1940, 27-year-old Irvin Bauman from Eureka, Illinois, competed in a competition in Davenport, Iowa. He hand-picked 47 bushels of corn in 80 minutes. Irvin's harvesting rate was 35 bushels per hour. Mr. Bauman only had to keep up this furious rate of hand-picking corn for 80 minutes, not a whole day. The average farmer could hand-harvest 100 bushels of corn in a nine-hour workday or a rate of 11 bushels per hour.

Back in 1940, the average farm size in Livingston County was 160 acres. Corn yields back then averaged only 70 bushels per acre. If the farmer tackled harvesting his farm by himself, it would have taken him 112 days to shuck his corn. If the farmer could get ten people to help with the corn harvest, it would only take 11 days of harvesting. This need for labor was one reason why farm families typically had a lot of children to help work on the farm. Farmers also used hired men or hired seasonal labor to help with the harvesting.

Two-row mechanical corn pickers started to get used by farmers in the mid-1930s. These machines used two rotating rollers to draw in the corn stalk and then separate the ear from the plant. The corn ears were then transported by machinery to a wagon pulled behind the corn picker. The two rollers each rotated at about 500 RPM, and they spun in opposite

directions. A two-row corn picker could harvest corn at a rate of 300 bushels per hour. The picker harvested corn at a rate 27 times faster than shucking by hand. The farmer could harvest his corn crop by himself, with no other labor required.

The biggest operational problem with the corn pickers was their susceptibility to plugging. If the farmer moved the corn sheller too fast through the field, the rollers would get jammed and stop moving. The farmer would have to dismount from the tractor and walk around to the corn picker's front. The farmer would grab one of the plugged corn stalks and try to pull it out of the roller. If this un-jammed the roller, it would start rotating again. The rollers pulled in the corn stalk and the farmer's hand attached to the stalk. The farmer's hand and arm were crushed in the corn picker.

The corn picker design mathematics reveals the rollers can pull in a corn stalk at a rate of seven feet per second. The picker could draw in a 20-inch long corn stalk in just one-quarter of a second. If the farmer's hand was holding onto the end of the stalk, his body could not react fast enough to let go of the corn stalk in just a quarter of a second.

The safest way to unplug a corn picker was to turn off the tractor powering the picker. The farmer could un-jam the picker safely. Once the picker jam was cleared, the farmer could climb back on the tractor and start the tractor back up again.

By 1938, pickers were used to harvest about 43 percent of the corn in Illinois. The use of corn pickers increased to 75 percent of the harvest in 1946, and 96 percent by 1956. The number of corn pickers in Illinois grew from 37,000 in 1945, to 109,000 by 1964.

As corn pickers replaced hand shucking of corn, the number of accidents soared. A review of the Pantagraph newspaper archives found there were 214 corn picker accidents between 1930 and 1968. There were so many accidents the University of Illinois developed a safety brochure to try to help educate farmers on corn pickers. This brochure was Circular 697, "Corn Picker Operation to Save Corn and Hands."

The University of Illinois also set up safety exhibits at various agricultural related events. One of these safety exhibits was designed so farmers could learn about reaction time using their own hands. The farmer would try to react in time to prevent an accident using his hands. The farmer would fail on every attempt, but would not be injured from participating in the safety exhibit.

The fact that corn pickers jammed so easily led to other accidents besides using your hands to pull out a jammed stalk. Some farmers slipped and fell, getting on or off the tractor to tend to a jam. Other farmers accidentally got their clothing caught in the rollers when they started unexpectedly running again.

In November of 1935, Curtis Weeks had a "near-miss" safety incident with a picker. The machine jammed up, and Curtis went to investigate without stopping the machinery. In some manner, his clothing became caught in the moving mechanism. The machine ripped his new pair of overalls from his body. He escaped with a slight injury to his legs.

In October of 1957, Clarence Simpson (1916-2002) was not as lucky as Curtis Weeks. Clarence farmed just south of Fairbury. Clarence was operating a corn picker to harvest the crop on the farm of Norval Knapp. He got off the tractor to check on a chain on the picker. Clarence left the machine running. Mr. Simpson pushed on a corn stalk sticking out of the picker with the palm of his right hand. Somehow, a corn stalk caught on the sleeve of his left hand and drew his hand into the rollers. Mr. Simpson lost his left hand in this accident.

Corn pickers started to be replaced by self-propelled combines in the late 1960s. The design of the combines was much improved compared to corn pickers, and fewer jams occurred. For over 30 years, corn pickers were a great labor saver for farmers, but they had an abysmal safety record.



John Deere Corn Picker



## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Cropsey Farmer Manages Technological Change**

It is always a difficult decision on whether or not to adopt new technology. Some people want the latest and greatest technology, and they are called "early adopters." Usually, the newest technology is relatively expensive, and the product is not fully developed. Other people decide to stretch the old technology as long as possible. They do not purchase new technology until the price has dropped, and the product is fully developed.

Reverend Christian Gerber was born in Ohio in 1848. When Rev. Gerber was 16 years old, his family moved from Ohio to the Morton area in 1864. In 1870, Rev. Gerber married Barbara Roth. Rev. Gerber and Barbara had seven children. Unfortunately, a scarlet fever epidemic took the lives of three of their children.

In 1875, Rev. Gerber and his family moved from Morton to Belle Prairie Township, south of Fairbury. According to Benjamin Nussbaum's South Side Apostolic Christian Church history pamphlet, the original ministers of the South Side church were Rudolph Leuthold, Peter Sommer, Nick Wanner, Henry Ziegenhorn, and Christian Gerber.

In 1910, at the age of 62, Rev. Gerber was working in his hayfield. He was walking and driving the head team of horses hitched to a hay loader. John Hoerr, who was working with the hay loader, noticed the absence of Rev. Gerber. The horse team went by, and Mr. Hoerr saw the horse lines were dragging on the ground. Mr. Hoerr then noticed that Rev. Gerber had fallen to the ground. In just a few more minutes, Rev. Gerber passed away.

One of the sons of Rev. Gerber was Christian Samuel Gerber, born in 1888 in Fairbury. Christian S. Gerber was commonly called Chris Gerber. He grew up on his father's farm in Belle Prairie Township and attended country school. Chris Gerber was 22 years old when his father, the Rev. Chris Gerber, passed away.

In the 1800s, Fairbury area barns were built with a rectangular framed design. When a farmer needed a new barn, local neighbors would hold a "barn raising" day and help to construct the new barn. Timber was readily available in that era, and these barns were built using rugged timber frames.

In the early 1900s, the University of Illinois began promoting round-shaped barns instead of rectangular framed designs. Round barns were built at the Urbana campus to show them to farmers. The University claimed that round barns offered greater convenience in the storing, handling, and distributing of feed to livestock. Round barns were lower cost to build than conventional rectangular barns. In 1910, the University published Bulletin Number 43 on the economy of the round dairy barn.

In 1912, Chris Gerber was a 24-year-old farmer. Chris decided he needed to build a new barn on his farm eight miles south of Fairbury. Rather than making the traditional rectangular framed barn, Chris elected to go with the latest round barn technology. Chris's barn was 70 feet in diameter and 20 feet to the eaves. It was also equipped with a 12 foot by 42-foot silo in the center of the barn. The round barn that Chris built burned down in March of 1957.

Because of the University of Illinois promoting round barns, some were built all around the state in the 1910 era. The circular design never really became a popular design. The long-term trend of no longer raising livestock negated the need for new barns. Most farmers and their neighbors could easily build a conventional rectangular framed design. It required a lot more skill and effort to make a round versus rectangular structure.

At the same time Chris Gerber was building his round barn; another revolution in technology took place in agriculture. Horses were being replaced by mechanical tractors. Many of those first tractors were behemoths powered by steam engines. Then the technology shifted to smaller tractors powered by internal combustion engines.

For farmers like Chris Gerber, who grew up using horses to power their farm equipment, it was tough to give up their horses. By the late 1930s,

horses were quickly being replaced by gasoline-powered tractors. By 1950, there were almost no horses used on farms anymore.

In 1938, after most farmers had given up their horses, Chris Gerber decided not to purchase a tractor. He decided to stretch his old technology of horses as long as possible before buying a tractor. Each year, improvements were made to farm implements, like corn planters. By 1938, all the latest technology planters were designed to be pulled by tractors, not horses. Chris Gerber wanted to keep using his horses, but he wanted a better quality corn planter. Chris modified a new corn planter so horses could pull it instead of a tractor.

Because so few farmers were still using horses in 1938, the Pantagraph decided to write a story about a Cropsey farmer who was still using horses to farm. Chris Gerber and his son Emil Gerber were interviewed for the story. A Pantagraph photographer took pictures of Chris and his son Emil planting their cornfield. The photo shows Emil Gerber riding on the front of the four-row corn planter and driving a team of two horses. Father Chris Gerber is watching the planting operation. The horse-drawn planter was able to plant three acres of corn per hour.

The Pantagraph is working with the McLean County Museum of History on a new project. The Pantagraph is releasing the photo negatives they used for their newspaper stories. The McLean County Museum of History digitizes the images and makes them available for free to the public. The high-quality photographic negative for the story about Chris Gerber still using horses to plan corn in 1938 is one of the images made possible by this project.

Back in 1912, when Chris Gerber was only 24 years old, he chose to use the latest technology when he built a new round barn. By the time Chris Gerber was 50 years old, he decided not to use tractors, the latest technology. Instead, Chris blended the old technology of horses with the newest technology in corn planters. It is always interesting to see how people decide whether or not to use the latest technology available.



Cropsey farmer Chris Gerber watches his son Emil Gerber use two horses to pull a four-row corn planter in 1938.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Fairbury Woman Pioneer Film Producer**

John Coomer Jr. was born in Vermont in 1817. His parents were John Coomer Sr. and Sarah Mason. John Coomer Jr. grew up in Vermont and learned the carpenter trade. At the age of 26, John Jr. married Miss Jenette Abbott in Vermont in 1843. Unfortunately, Jenette only lived six months after she married. Two years after her death, John Jr. married Miss Harriet N. Cheney in Vermont. Their first child, Allen C. Coomer, was born in 1847 in Vermont.

In 1848, John Coomer Jr. made an exploratory trip out west to Central Illinois. He decided he eventually wanted to move to what is now the Fairbury area. John Jr. returned to Vermont for seven more years before he moved to Fairbury.

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad ran its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. On December 31, 1857, John Coomer traveled east from Chenoa to Fairbury. There was no sign of a town when he arrived. John built the first house in Fairbury. Mr. Coomer established a lumberyard that did a brisk business because of all the new homes built in the new town.

In 1863, John and Harriet had their second child, Francenna "Fanny" Coomer. In 1863, John Coomer sold his lumberyard. He used the money he made from running the lumberyard to become a real estate agent and lender of money. By 1888, John owned ten houses and lots in Fairbury plus an excellent tract of 350 acres of farmland.

The son of John Coomer Jr., Allen C. Coomer, married Louisa Cox in Fairbury. The daughter of John and Harriet Coomer, Fanny Coomer, married Victor Fogle in 1888 in Fairbury. The Pantagraph wedding announcement reported that Miss Fannie Coomer, a wealthy and well-known young lady in Fairbury, was united in marriage to Mr. Victor Vogel. The Pantagraph likely said she was a wealthy young lady because of her father's extensive real estate holdings in Fairbury.

In July of 1891, Fannie's brother, Allen C. Coomer, passed away at only 44 years of age. Soon after her brother passed away, her father, John Coomer Jr., passed away in Fairbury at the age of 74.

In 1893, Victor and Fanny Fogle had their only child, Harriet Virginia Fogle. She was named after her grandmother, Harriet Coomer. Harriet Fogle grew up in Fairbury and attended Fairbury schools. In 1907, at the age of 87, Harriet Coomer passed away. She left her grand-daughter Harriet Fogle, \$12,000 in her will. This amount would be equivalent to \$346,000 in today's dollars.

Harriet Fogle graduated with the Fairbury Township High School Class of 1911. The Class of 1911 had eight graduates. Harriet's classmates were Lloyd Lamkin, Nellie Sutton, Reuben King, Wayne Mitten, John Joda, Margaret Carrithers, and Will C. Mundt.

In 1914, the Pantagraph published a story about a Fairbury P.O. Box being an heirloom. The article recounted that John Coomer Jr. built the first home in Fairbury in 1857. John was one of the first people in Fairbury to subscribe to a post office box in 1858. After John died, his daughter, Mrs. Fannie Fogle, continued the subscription. When she died, the grand-daughter of John Coomer, Miss Harriet Fogle, continued the subscription. As of 1914, the post office box had been in the Coomer family for 58 years.

After finishing high school, Harriet attended the prestigious Ward-Belmont school in Nashville. It was regarded as a very prestigious "finishing school" by the more aristocratic families of the South.

Harriet then enrolled at Vanderbilt University as a freshman for the 1914-1915 school year. She was the only female student among the 60 students enrolled in the Vanderbilt Engineering Department. That year Harriet met Warren Watson Bell, who was a sophomore in the Medical Department. In 1914, Harriet received a license plate for the Cadillac she owned in Nashville.

In 1916, at the age of 22, Harriet V. Fogle married Dr. Warren W. Bell in Williamson, Tennessee. Warren Bell was born in Chicago and was a 21-

year-old new medical doctor. In the 1920 U.S. Census, Dr. Bell and wife Harriet were living in Manhattan, New York.

In September of 1921, Dr. Bell and Harriet visited Fairbury. Dr. Bell and his wife were spending their summer in Michigan and decided to visit friends in Fairbury.

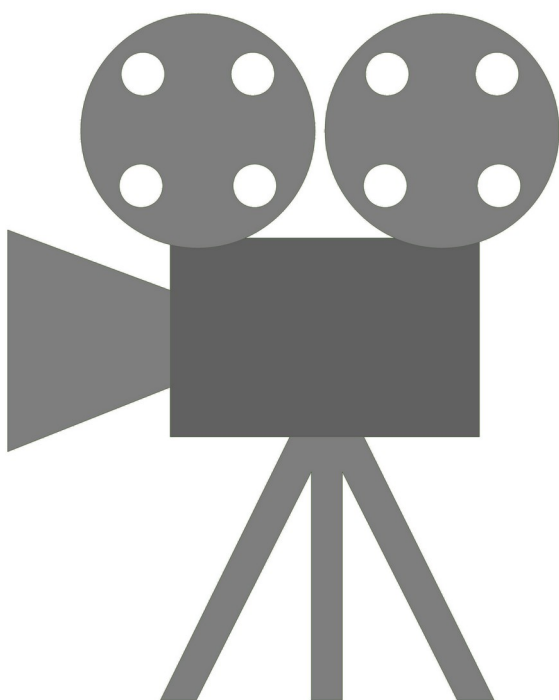
In March of 1927, the Pantagraph reported that Mrs. Warren Bell of Seattle, formerly Miss Harriet Fogle, called on friends in Fairbury. Mrs. Bell had been in Venice, California, since the early fall of 1926. She had just been in New York and was traveling by automobile back to Seattle. Mrs. Bell had recently entered the moving picture field as a producer of movie films. Her film company was known as the H.V. firm. Harriet had marketed one film and had contracts for six others. When Harriet returned to California, she was going to produce the other six films. Harriet's first production film was scheduled to be in the movie theater circuits soon.

Harriet likely chose H.V. as the name of her film company because that was the initials for her maiden name, Harriet Virginia Fogle. Unfortunately, no records can be found concerning the number and names of the movies she produced.

Sometime between 1927 and 1930, Dr. Bell and Harriet divorced. By the 1930 U.S. Census, Dr. Bell had married Geraldine Lluk. They had two children, and Dr. Bell died in Seattle in 1955.

Harriet then married James G. Fulton (1894-1966). They lived in the San Diego, California area. James and Harriet Fulton had three children. Harriet passed away in 1986.

Very few women were early film producers in Hollywood. Harriet Fogle was a pioneer in this industry because she was producing films in 1927. Her inherited wealth and her husband's income as a medical doctor could have allowed her to finance her movie production company. It is possible the Great Depression starting in 1929 wiped her out financially. In 1931, her parent's home in Fairbury at the northeast corner of Oak and Fifth Streets was foreclosed and sold at auction. Harriet was also busy with her second marriage and children to raise. Maybe someday, the names and dates of the movies she produced will be discovered.





## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Largest Farm in the United States**

Lucas Sullivant was born in 1765 in Virginia. He married Sarah Starling, also from Virginia. They moved to Columbus, Ohio, and were some of the earliest settlers in that area. Lucas Sullivant accumulated a vast amount of farmland. One of the three sons of Lucas and Sarah was Michael Lucas Sullivant. M. L. Sullivant was born in 1807 in Columbus, Ohio. Michael was educated at Ohio University, and Centre College, Kentucky. At an early age, he exhibited a great interest in agricultural affairs.

Michael's father died in 1823. After he finished college, Michael settled upon the farm estate he had inherited from his father. He became a stock-grower and grazer. He helped to organize the Ohio State Board of Agriculture.

In October of 1852, Michael first visited Illinois. He decided the fertile prairie lands had great potential as productive farmland. Within four years, Mr. Sullivant purchased about 80,000 acres in the counties of Champaign, Ford, and Livingston. He bought most of this land from the federal government for \$1.50 per acre. Michael also borrowed from East Coast banks to have enough money to start improving the raw prairie lands.

In 1855, he began his first improvement in Illinois at his Broadlands farm in Champaign County. Michael was 48 years old when he started farming in Champaign. In 1861, he and his family moved from Columbus, Ohio, to Champaign, Illinois. In 1866, Michael experienced business problems. He sold the remainder of his Ohio land. He also sold the 23,000 acre Broadlands farm in Champaign to Mr. Alexander for \$250,000. This amount would be equivalent to \$4.3 million in today's dollars. He and his family moved to his 40,000 acre Burr Oaks farm in Ford County in 1867.

M. L. Sullivant was 60 years old when he started to transform the virgin prairie at Burr Oaks to a productive corn farm. In 1868, he was able to break the prairie and plant 1,000 acres of corn. The next year, he converted another 5,000 acres of virgin land to cornfields.

By 1870, the Burr Oak farm attracted national attention as the largest farm in the United States. Harper's Weekly magazine published a fascinating story about how farming was performed on the vast 40,000-acre farm in Central Illinois.

By the time the September 23, 1871, Harper's Weekly article was written, Mr. Sullivant had 11,000 acres of corn growing at Burr Oak. The average yield at that time was 45 bushels to the acre. Besides the cornfields, Mr. Sullivant had 5,000 acres of other crops under cultivation.

The reporter struggled with how to give the magazine readers an idea of the vastness of green oceans of corn grown at Burr Oak. The reporter decided to calculate how big of a corn crib would be required to hold the harvest. He estimated it would take a continuous corn crib that was 12 feet wide, eight feet tall, and five miles in length. This theoretical corn crib would hold 495,000 bushels of ear corn.

Mr. Sullivant first had to break the prairie with its natural vegetation. Teams of oxen were used to pull a breaking plow. This plow cut a furrow twenty inches in width. The primary purpose of this first pass was to turn over the sod and leave a furrow about three inches in depth. This ground was often immediately planted in corn. The first year's harvest would only be about 20 bushels per acre. If there were time to follow the breaking plow with a stirring-plow, the first year's corn crop would increase to 45 bushels per acre. Every bushel of corn saved from the harvest was used to plant eight acres of corn the next season.

Most of the farmland in Central Illinois was wet and swampy. In the 1870s, Mr. Sullivant built drainage ditches in his fields to help remove the excess water. He used a ditching plow that was about 18 feet in length. It had a plowshare that was 11 feet wide and took 68 oxen and eight men to operate it. This work crew could finish three and a half miles of new ditch each day of work.

The machinery used at Burr Oak would handsomely stock two or three agricultural implement stores. This machinery included 150 steel plows, 75 breaking plows, 142 cultivators, 45 corn planters, and 25 gang-harrows. Five blacksmiths were employed to shoe the horses and repair the farm equipment.

The only alcohol allowed at Burr Oak was whiskey used to treat snake bites. Mr. Sullivant was doubtful whether the whiskey would not injure the man more than the snake bite.

Mr. Sullivant organized his 40,000 Burr Oak farm similar to a military command structure. He was the commander-in-chief. Mr. J. M. Miner was his brigadier general. Next in the organization were twelve captains, each with three lieutenants. Each lieutenant had charge of a squad of men. A total of 250 men were employed at Burr Oak farm.

Just as Mr. Sullivant was getting his huge farm operating efficiently, he encountered some massive financial headwinds. The first problem was the Panic of 1873. This panic was a financial crisis that triggered a worldwide economic depression. In addition to the Panic of 1873, Burr Oak farm experienced three bad harvest years in a row. Mr. Sullivant was unable to make the interest payments due to his lenders.

Then Mr. Sullivant became gravely ill in early 1878. A public sale of all his property was held. Mr. Hiram Sibley, of Rochester, N.Y., was his largest creditor, and by this sale became the possessor of 17,641 acres of Burr Oaks Farm. The Equitable Trust Company and others took the balance of the estate, comprising 14,000 acres. Mr. Sullivant died in January of 1879. Sibley, Illinois, is named after Hiram Sibley.

When Burr Oak farm started to shut down, approximately 100 black men lost their jobs. Most of them moved to nearby Fairbury. After Mr. Sullivant's death, his widow often visited the wife of John J. Taylor in Fairbury. Mr. Taylor was a prominent Fairbury banker.

In 1871, at the age of 64, Michael Sullivant was nationally renowned as the owner and manager of one of the largest farms in the United States. In the next eight years, he would lose his entire 40,000-acre farm, become gravely ill, and die.



Mr. Sullivant and his Captains at evening meeting in 1871

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Fires from Feud Terrorized Early Fairbury Citizens**

One of Fairbury's most interesting early citizens was William T. Stackpole. He met and married his wife, Jennie Sophia Harlow, in 1856 in Pekin, Illinois. She was the daughter of Joshua C. Harlow and Anna Goodrich Austin. They moved to Fairbury in 1857, the same year the village was founded. They built a home located at the northeast corner of Maple and Webster streets. This home still stands today at the southeast corner of Marsh Park. William T. Stackpole primarily dealt in real estate sales.

John Marsh was born in New York in 1805. He married Jerusha Caroline Benham, but she died in 1856 in Fairbury. He then married Elizabeth G. Waterbury. John Marsh built a home at the southwest corner of Marsh Park. This home also still stands today.

With his first wife, John Marsh had a son Henry L. Marsh who was born in 1834. He first married Amanda Eldridge. She died in 1865, and he married Olive Donaho.

William Wallace Amsbary was born in New York in 1832. He married Harriet E. Harlow. Her parents were Hamlet Amsbary and Freedom Bascom. Harriet's father was a half-brother to the father of William T. Stackpole's wife, Jennie Harlow. Harriet and Jennie were paternal first cousins.

John and his son Henry Marsh were both ambitious businessmen. They formed the Marsh addition to the village of Fairbury. They designated one city block to become Marsh Park. In 1862, they dug 180 feet down and found coal one mile west of Fairbury. Their long-term vision was for the area west of Second Street to be the center of Fairbury's business. They designated Livingston Square as their future business center. The Arcade block was between the current water tower and the railroad.

The railroad employees and the citizens of Fairbury did not get along. Fairbury businesses would sell items to the railroad, and then the railroad would not pay the bill. The railroad men often got drunk, got into fights, and did everything they could to agitate the Fairbury citizens. After ten years of bad relations between the railroad and the city, an engineer decided to excessively fire up his steam locomotive and belch smoke and live cinders as he sped through town. When the engineer got to the next stop at Forrest, he looked back west and said, "I think I set the whole darn town on fire!". His sparks caused the grain elevator on the east end of Fairbury to catch fire. The fire spread, and all the east end businesses were burned down.

John and son Henry Marsh saw this calamity as a great business opportunity. With the east end businesses wiped out, they could take over all the Fairbury businesses. Quickly, the Arcade block added two saddle and harness shops, a gun and sporting goods store, a poultry house, a drug store, and the Fairbury marble works. John Marsh persuaded the McDowells to build on the north side of Livingston Square. They established a dry goods store, a hardware store, and a bank. Then John Marsh built the Livingston Hotel. It cost \$17,000 to build and was known far and wide as the only hotel in Central Illinois, which had running water.

Nobody is really sure what started the East and West Side Feuds. John and son Henry Marsh were the West Siders. The East Siders were William Wallace Amsbary and his sons. The East Enders went to work to match the Marsh's, item for item. Marsh had a grist mill, and so they had one; ditto the dry goods, drug and grocery stores, and the grain elevators. They even decided to have a coal mine, too. Amsbary had to solicit East Coast investors for his coal mine. He also had to import a group of Scottish miners to bore the new shaft. Amsbary's new coal mine was known as the East Side Mine. A small slag pile from this mine still exists north of the tracks between Ninth and Tenth streets.

About this time, the East Enders congratulated themselves for building businesses equal to the West Enders. Then it was announced a new railroad was coming to Fairbury. It was the Chicago & Paducah Railroad and would run from Streator to Strawn. The East Enders assumed the new railroad would go through the center of town and then head south for Strawn.

Unbeknownst to the East Siders, the Marsh's had been in secret negotiations with the new railroad. They arranged for the new line to enter on the west side of Fairbury and then turn south for Strawn, completely bypassing the east side of Fairbury.

The Marsh's celebrated their victory in the McDowell Hall, with the President of the new railroad. The next morning, the Marsh's and their allies were hungover from the big party. Amsbary and his crew got some armed guards and extended the new railroad to the east side of Fairbury before it headed south for Strawn.

To celebrate, Amsbary built the new "Fairbury House" hotel. Because Marsh's rival hotel was advertised as very luxurious, Amsbary called his new hotel the "Poorest Hotel in Illinois."

The two feuding sides then started burning down each other's buildings. Fires were so frequent that insurance companies charged five percent of the building's value as the annual premium. Today, the insurance cost is a fraction of one percent. As a result, most of the business owners had no fire insurance. Citizens were instructed to put a change of clothes by their back door, in case their house caught on fire and they had to exit their home quickly.

Several factors finally put an end to the disastrous feud. William T. Stackpole helped to negotiate an end to the dispute. Since his wife and Amsbary's wife were cousins, and he was friends with the Marsh's, he was able to negotiate with both sides. In 1885, John Marsh died. The next year, in 1886, his son Henry Marsh died. William Wallace Amsbary moved from Fairbury to Urbana in 1899. He died in 1910.

Thankfully, the long feud eventually ended, and Fairbury went on to prosper and grow into the peaceful community it is today.



Firemen in the late 1800s had to pull their water pumping unit to the fire. Then three men on each side pushed the wood bars up and down to pump water to the fire.



## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Fairbury Pool a Public Safety Improvement**

Those of us who have grown up in Fairbury since 1958, don't appreciate how dangerous it was to take a swim before the first swimming pool opened. On a hot summer day, local children and adults would have to swim in Indian Creek, the Vermilion River, or a quarry pond. The only public swimming pool in the area was the Pontiac Humiston pool in Chautauqua Park. The Munz sandpit was a popular swimming hole for many Fairbury citizens.

In May of 1880, two young boys played in the water of Indian Creek south of the Chicago & Paducah Railroad bridge. The water was high due to recent heavy rains. The two boys were Harry Jones, aged eleven, and Robert Harris, aged nine. Around noon, Harry stepped off into the west current of the stream. He was soon swept out of sight and drowned. The other boy, Robert Harris, was in deep water also, but he managed to get to shore. The body of Harry Jones was not found until the next day.

In July of 1911, five young Chicago men visited Fairbury. Three of the boys were brothers and included Isador, Mose, and Abe Goldberg. The other two were friends Mort Fisher and Sol Goldberg. Sol Goldberg was not related to the three Goldberg brothers. The three brothers came down to Fairbury to visit with their sister Mrs. L. Samorowich and her husband.

On Wednesday morning, the boys talked about going to the Munz swimming hole. Mr. Samorowich urged the boys not to swim there because the water was deep, and some of the boys did not know how to swim. The boys decided to go anyway, and young Abe Goldberg showed them the way to the swimming hole. When they got to the sandpit, five Fairbury boys were already swimming in the pool. They were Dean Vorhees, Don Dixon, Elmer Green, Arthur Worrick, and young Mr. Rapp.

Isador Goldberg and Sol Goldberg started to play in the water. They stayed close to the edge of the pond because neither one were good swimmers. Isador got too far away from the side and went down into twelve feet deep water. When Isador came up, he grabbed onto Sol, but they both went

down. When they came back up, Sol was able to separate from Isador and keep his head above water. Elmer Green pushed a wood plank out to Sol, and he was able to get out of the water. Isador Goldberg drowned. Two physicians were unable to revive Isador. Isador Goldberg was twenty-seven years old and left a widow and a three-month-old child.

In September of 1920, nineteen-year-old David Watkins of West Branch, Michigan, worked the summer on his uncle's farm south of Fairbury. His uncle was Henry Watkins. David Watkins and his Fairbury cousin Rollie Watkins decided to go for a swim in the Munz sandpit on Sunday afternoon. David wanted his cousin to swim across the pond, but Rollie refused, thinking it was too long of a distance for him. David decided to swim across by himself. When he got within twenty feet of the other side, Clarence Rightsell, who was fishing, noticed that David was drowning. Rollie swam to David's aid, but he had panicked and pulled him down with him. Rollie got loose from David and tried to save him again, but David did not come back up. It took forty minutes to find the body, and he could not be revived.

In June of 1921, Everett Arnold, the sixteen-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Arnold of Colfax, went swimming with some friends in the Munz sandpit. Everett did not know how to swim. Once Everett got into water over his head, he went down. His body was recovered ten minutes after he disappeared. Efforts to revive him were unsuccessful.

In July of 1924, Thelma DeMoss was fifteen years old. She went with her friends Carolyn Bach and Bertha Keller to the Munz sandpit around 3:30 in the afternoon. After they swam for fifteen minutes, they all got out of the water. Thelma then suggested they swim across from one bank to the other. The banks curve quite a bit at this point, and the distance was not so great. However, Carolyn Bach asked her if she thought she could do it. Thelma, for an answer, gave a little toss of her head and a shrug of her shoulders and started swimming. All three successfully reached the other bank.

The swim seemed to task Thelma's strength more or less, but she started back across with the others with Carolyn Bach leading and Bertha Keller last and Thelma in the center. Carolyn had just reached a place where she could touch the bottom when she looked around and saw Thelma going

down with the water up to her nose. Carolyn started back towards Thelma, but Bertha Keller got there first. Bertha held out her hand to Thelma, who grasped it, but her hand slipped out as she sank for the last time. Her body was found after forty minutes of frantic searching. She could not be revived.

In May of 1934, thirty-year-old Louise Westervelt told her mother that she was going to take a walk through the golf course. When she did not return home by noon, her mother asked Mr. C. R. Voris to investigate. He found that she had been seen on the diving board at the Munz sandpit. Her body was found around four PM. The Coroner's Jury found that Louise Westervelt came to her death "from drowning by accidentally falling from a slanting board at the base of the diving pier at the Munz sandpit."

The saddest drowning case occurred in May of 1948. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Besgrove were living on Clay Street on the southwest edge of Fairbury. Three of their children went to Indian Creek at about three PM to go swimming. They were June Beth, aged 14, Sylvia Marie, aged 13, and Frank Edgar, aged 10. A six-year-old daughter remained at home. When the children did not return home for supper, the parents went looking for them. Their bicycles were found by the old Werling slaughterhouse. They found all three children had drowned in Indian Creek.

Fairbury is very fortunate to have an excellent public swimming pool with well-trained lifeguards. Children can also learn how to swim from trained instructors.



Sign at Fairbury's swimming pool.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **One of Fairbury's Greatest Volunteers**

Decatur Veatch was one of the pioneer farmers of the Fairbury area. He was born in 1819 in Harrison, Indiana. In 1846, he moved to Indian Grove Township. Miss Matilda R. Smith was born in 1827 in Franklin County, Kentucky. Matilda married Decatur Veatch in 1846. In 1870, Decatur Veatch went into business with John Virgin to import Percheron draft horses from France to Fairbury. They stayed in business together until 1873 when Decatur died. Mr. and Mrs. Decatur Veatch had 11 children.

One of the 11 children of Decatur and Matilda Veatch was William S. Veatch. He was born in Fairbury in 1864. William Veatch married Grace Clift (1870-1910). William and Grace Veatch had two children, Clift Decatur Veatch and Charles W. Veatch Sr.

Emma L. McDowell (1858-1937) was descended from another pioneer farmer. The first settler in the Fairbury area was Major Darnall, who settled south of Fairbury in 1829. Just three years later, in 1832, the McDowell family settled north of Fairbury. Emma was the granddaughter of John McDowell and Elizabeth Price, who arrived in 1832. Emma's parents were Oliver Perry McDowell and Emily Myer.

Albert Comstock Bartlett was also descended from two old Fairbury families. His parents were Cicero C. Bartlett (1826-1883) and Chloe Beach (1832-1895). A.C. Bartlett married Emma L. McDowell in Fairbury in 1878. One of their children was Louise B. Bartlett. Louise was born in 1895 in Fairbury.

The marriage of Charles W. Veatch Sr. and Louise B. Bartlett in 1916 brought together several of the founding families of the Fairbury area. Charles and Louise Veatch had two children. Charles Veatch Jr. was born in 1926, and Bernice L. Veatch was born in 1929. Bernice L. Veatch never married. She died in Watseka in 2011.

Charles Veatch Jr. grew up in Fairbury and attended local schools. He was Livingston County's first Eagle Scout.

Charles W. Veatch Sr. established a real estate and insurance company in Fairbury. When his son, Charles Veatch Jr., filled out his World War II draft registration card, he gave his address as 206 West Elm Street in Fairbury. His home phone number was 512, and he was working at Walton's Department Store.

Charles Veatch Jr. entered the U.S. Army Infantry and Engineers in February of 1945 at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He served until he was discharged in March of 1946 at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois. After the war was over, Charles Veatch Jr. had planned on attending the University of Illinois. But during the war, his mother died, and his father suffered a heart attack. He decided not to attend college and to work in his father's business.

Eula Mae Bess was the daughter of Ernest R. Bess and Helen M. Snyder. Eula Mae attended Illinois State Normal University and one year at Wesleyan University studying voice. She sang in the choir of the Baptist churches in Fairbury and Bloomington.

Shortly after finishing his military service, Charles Veatch Jr. married Eula Mae Bess in 1948. Charles and Eula Mae Veatch had four children in Fairbury. They were Scott, Seth, Sarah, and Susan.

Although he was working full-time in his father's insurance and real estate business and busy raising four children, Charles Veatch Jr. was an extraordinary civic volunteer in the 1950s in Fairbury. He was active in the Fairbury Mausoleum Association, the Masonic Lodge, the Red Cross, and the Jaycees. He was also very actively involved in the Fairbury Methodist Church and was a member of the Board of Directors.

In early 1957, Charles Veatch Jr. tackled his most ambitious project. In that era, Fairbury did not have a swimming pool. The Fairbury Jaycees did a public survey and found both citizens and community groups wanted to build a swimming pool in Fairbury. As a result, the Fairbury Swimming Pool association was formed. Charles Veatch was named President.

In the Summer of 1957, a public fund-raising drive began to raise \$60,000. In September of 1957, the Fairbury Community Swimming Pool

Association announced they had purchased land to build a new swimming pool. They bought two acres on the west side of First Street just north of the city limits and south of the Everett Crews residence.

The grand opening of the new swimming pool was held on Memorial Day, 1958. More than 300 citizens attended the event. An hour and ten-minute program by the University of Illinois Swimming team was highlighted by diving exhibitions from the high dive board. On opening day, 274 people swam in the new pool. Because of the efforts of Charles Veatch Jr. and many other local volunteers, Fairbury got a swimming pool. Charles Veatch Jr. was a certified Red Cross swimming and diving instructor. After the Fairbury pool opened, he gave swimming lessons to local children.

In the Fall of 1960, Charles Veatch Jr. and his wife moved from Fairbury to Monterey, California. In California, he was an insurance broker in the Monterey and Carmel areas. Charles continued to be active in community affairs in California. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club and a President of the Monterey Peninsula Association of Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers. Charles Veatch Jr. was also a Marshal at the AT&T Pro-Am at Pebble Beach, California. He also marshaled at the U.S. Open golf tournament in 1992.

Charles Veatch Jr. died in California in 1995 at the age of 69. He was initially buried in the El Carmelo Cemetery in Pacific Grove, California. His wife, Eula Mae Veatch, passed away in 2006. Before she died, Eula Mae had her husband's body exhumed and cremated. Eula Mae and the ashes of her husband were interred in the Fairbury Mausoleum. Charles Veatch Sr. and his wife were also interred in the Mausoleum.

A review of Fairbury history reveals the town has a long history of citizens volunteering in community groups to improve Fairbury. Charles Veatch Jr. was an exemplary example of a Fairbury citizen who did his best to improve our community's quality of life.

CHARLES W. VEATCH JR., REALTOR AND INSURANCE AGENT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HIS FATHER IN FAIRBURY, IS PRESIDENT OF THE FAIRBURY SWIMMING POOL ASSOCIATION; PRESIDENT OF THE FAIRBURY MAUSOLEUM ASSOCIATION; COMMANDER OF ST. PAUL COMMANDERY OF THE MASONIC LODGE, AND IS HOME SERVICE CHAIRMAN FOR INDIAN GROVE TOWNSHIP CHAPTER, AMERICAN RED CROSS.



HE WORKS WITH THE RED CROSS WATER SAFETY PROGRAM FOR THE LIVINGSTON COUNTY CHAPTER TOO. HE WAS TREASURER OF THE FAIRBURY METHODIST CHURCH FOR EIGHT YEARS AND NOW IS SECRETARY OF THE CHURCH'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES. UNTIL LAST APRIL, HE WAS PRESIDENT OF THE FAIRBURY JAYCEES. MR. VEATCH HAS RECENTLY BEEN SELECTED AS ONE OF THE FAIRBURY "YOUNG MEN OF THE YEAR."

HE IS A WORLD WAR II ARMY VETERAN. HE IS MARRIED AND THE FATHER OF THREE SMALL CHILDREN

*Charles W. Veatch Jr.*

**FAIRBURY**

Community Profile

1958 Pantagraph



## **CHAPTER 16**

### **Fairbury Factory Nearing 60 Years in Business**

Edward E. Hokin was born in 1916 in Chicago. His parents were Barney E. Hokin and Lorraine E. Hokin. Ed Hokin earned technical college degrees from both the University of Illinois and the Illinois Institute of Technology. After finishing his schooling, Ed took over his father-in-law's company named Union Asbestos and Rubber. This company got its start making wicks for oil lamps. As technology changed, the company switched to the asbestos and rubber products. The company name was later changed to UNR Industries Inc.

In 1948, Ed Hokin started his own steel products company. For the company name, he chose to use his last name, spelled backward. The new company was named Nikoh Tube Company, a division of International Rolling Mill products corporation. Ed purchased 285,000 square feet of ground in Chicago to build a new tube and pipe factory.

In 1951, the International Rolling Mill Products Corporation bought a significant interest in the Union Asbestos and Rubber Company. The two companies continued to exist as separate companies after the stock purchase.

In 1960, William J. "Bill" Allison was serving as sales manager for the Nikoh Tube Company in Chicago. Bill graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, majoring in business. He started working in the electric-weld industry in 1957. Bill ran ads in the 1960 Chicago Tribune looking for new salespeople to work for him at Nikoh Tube.

In 1961, the Chicago Tribune published a story about the new suburb of Elk Grove Village using all underground wiring. All the exterior electrical and phone lines were installed underground. Inside the new homes, electrical conduits were used to route all of the electrical wiring. Each house had a 150-ampere Square D lighting panel. The Nikoh Tube Company of Chicago manufactured all of the conduits used for the electrical wiring. If the trend of using conduit in the interior of homes

caught on, Nikoh Tube would have to expand to have enough manufacturing capacity.

Around this time, Edward M. Ray became a co-owner of the Nikoh Tube company with Ed Hokin. Ed Ray was born in 1916 in Chicago.

In 1963, Fairbury citizens got the first news there might be a new factory built in Fairbury. This new two-million-dollar plant needed land to build on and a 250 gallon a minute water supply. The Fairbury Chamber of Commerce began to work with Ed Ray of Nikoh Tube on fulfilling the new plant's requirement. \$30,000 was raised from contributions from local business people in only a couple of weeks.

The funds were used to acquire the land just east of Fairbury on Route 24. A portion of the funds was used to pay to have a well drilled on the site. The new factory was named Fairbury Industries.

It took several months to build the new factory building. Nikoh Tube wanted to start production immediately in Fairbury. The Chamber of Commerce arranged to have tubing mills installed at two different temporary locations in Fairbury. The first location was in the Floral Hall building at the fairgrounds. The second temporary location was in a Farmer's Grain warehouse on East Locust Street. The mills operated in these two temporary locations until the new factory was completed.

The first employment ad published by Fairbury Industries was included in the May 9, 1963, edition of the Blade. Fairbury Industries signed a three-year contract with Local 567 of the Metal Worker's Union, AFL-CIO. Three pay grades were established with minimum pay of \$1.25 per hour and a maximum of \$1.80 per hour. The minimum salary of \$1.25 per hour would be equivalent to a rate of \$10.53 in today's dollars.

By September 12, 1963, 80 employees worked around the clock in the new \$2 million factory. The new building was 140,000 square feet. The new plant could make steel tubing from one-half to two inches and electrical conduit tubing from three-eighths to 4 inches.

On a cold winter day in 1965, Ed Ray was driving his children to Sunday School. A woman driving another car lost control of her vehicle on the

slushy Mundelein road. Her vehicle swerved across the median and hit Ed Ray's car head-on. Forty-nine-year-old Ed Ray and his 13-year-old son were killed immediately. Two other children were severely injured, but they eventually recovered from the wreck. With the death of Ed Ray, Bill Allison assumed the primary managerial role for the Fairbury facility.

In June of 1970, International Nikoh decided to sell the Fairbury facility to the Pennsylvania firm of Pittsburgh-International Corp., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Pittsburgh Tube. Bill Allison was promoted to the position of Vice-President of Pittsburgh-International Corporation when the acquisition occurred.

The Pittsburgh Tube Company had been in the steel tubing business for the previous 50 years. The company expected to continue technological advancements at the Fairbury facility.

In 1976, Bill Allison gave safe driving awards to the men who transported products from the Fairbury facility. Fairbury drivers who were honored included Lyle Corkhill, Jerry Potter, John Gaston, Larry Ronna, Dale Studebaker, J. D. McGuire, Jerry Barrett, Sam Terrell, and Ervin Fehr. Fairbury Police Chief Maurice Cox and State Trooper Ronald Vedder were honorary guests at the banquet.

In retrospect, the sale of the Fairbury plant in 1970 by Nikoh to the Pittsburgh Tube was a godsend for the Fairbury plant. Just a few years after this sale, asbestos was discovered to be a carcinogenic material. Most of the companies involved with making asbestos products had to declare bankruptcy because of all the lawsuits. In 1982, UNR Industries, which was associated with Nikoh Industries, had to file for Chapter 11 federal bankruptcy. If the Fairbury plant had not been sold, it might have been shut down as part of the asbestos bankruptcy lawsuits.

The current name of the Fairbury facility is PTC Alliance. After 57 years, the facility continues to thrive. The facility has donated to many community causes over the years and continues to offer employment to area citizens.



Fairbury Industries photograph circa 1962

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **Tractor Was 30 Years Ahead of It's Time**

Henry Ford's introduction of the low-cost Model T in 1908 ushered in a radical change in American life. People quickly switched from horses to automobiles for transportation. Farmers eventually switched from horses to tractors for farm work. Farmers adopted automobiles much faster than tractors to replace horses. The 1917 Prairie Farmer's Reliable Directory of Farmers and Breeders in Livingston County recorded that 132 Fairbury farmers owned autos, but only nine owned tractors.

Minneapolis-Moline was the product of the merger of three different companies in 1929. The first company was Minneapolis Steel & Machinery (MSM), which was noted for its Twin City tractors. The second company was the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company (MTMC), which also produced Minneapolis tractors. The third company was the Moline Plow Company. Minneapolis-Moline had two manufacturing facilities in Minnesota and one in Moline, Illinois.

Henry Ford released the low-cost Model T car in 1908. Henry then entered the agricultural field and introduced the Fordson tractor in 1918. In that era, International Harvester was a large manufacturer of agricultural equipment. International Harvester entered the passenger car market and made an automobile between 1907 and 1917.

By the middle of the 1930s, most farmers had replaced their horses with tractors. Product planners at Minneapolis-Moline noted that Henry Ford had successfully crossed over from making cars to making tractors. They also observed that International Harvester had crossed over from making agricultural equipment to automobiles.

Minneapolis-Moline got the idea that farmers might like a combination of a tractor and a car. Their idea was that after the farmer worked all day in his tractor, he could comfortably drive his wife to town for dinner. Engineers wanted the new tractor to be as comfortable as a car, including an enclosed cab. They named their new tractor the Minneapolis-Moline Model ULDX Comfortactor.

The ULDX tractor featured a streamlined cab and incorporated a styled grille and fenders into the design. The vehicle was also equipped with windshield wipers, headlights, taillights, speedometers, heater, cigarette lighter, glove box, and even a dome light. In other words, it looked like a car and had many of the comforts of a car.

The Comfortractor weighed 5,800 pounds and produced 46 horsepower. The engine was a high compression Minneapolis-Moline four-cylinder 283 cubic inch motor. It came equipped with five forward speeds and one reverse gear. It had a top speed of 40 MPH, much faster than other tractors. The 1938 Comfortractor had a price tag of \$2,000. This amount would be equivalent to \$34,738 in today's dollars. The Comfortractor was much more expensive than a similar John Deere or Farmall tractor.

In 1938, the Comfortractor was released for sale to farmers. Demonstrations of the revolutionary tractor were conducted by Minneapolis-Moline dealers all over the country. The nearest exhibit to Fairbury was held at Paxton, Illinois.

In 1938, Andrew Meister was a 24-year-old farmer, and his farm was located north of Fairbury. Andrew decided to purchase one of the modern Comfortractors. For some unknown reason, the tractor could not be shipped to the Minneapolis-Moline dealer in Fairbury. Andrew drove his new tractor from Peoria to his farm north of Fairbury. Since his new tractor could travel 40 miles-per-hour, it took him less than two hours to drive from Peoria to Fairbury. Three years after purchasing his new tractor, he married Elizabeth Ann Fehr in Fairbury.

Unfortunately, most farmers were not ready to accept the idea of a cross-over between a tractor and an automobile. Less than 150 of the Comfortractor model were manufactured, and production ended in 1941. When production ended, about 50 of the tractors were unsold at dealer's lots. These tractors were shipped back to the factory, and the cabs were removed. They were then sold as cab-less Model U tractors. The cab-less tractors were sold for around \$1,000, about half of the original \$2,000 price tag.

It is theorized that one reason for the low sales of the Comfortractor was that farmers grew up working outdoors with horses. These farmers accepted tractors without cabs because they were used to working in the elements. A "real farmer" did not need the comforts of a cab on his tractor. The Comforter was also significantly more expensive than other tractors with the same power.

Minneapolis-Moline was bought out in 1963 by the White Motor Company, who also owned the Oliver brand. White dropped the Minneapolis-Moline brand name in 1974. AGCO purchased White in 1991.

Today, less than 25 of the Comfortractors still exist. They are extremely rare and avidly sought by collectors. In 2016, a mint condition 1938 Comfortractor sold at a Michigan auction for \$200,000. If someone had purchased one of these tractors for around \$2,000 in 1938, then stored and sold it for \$200,000 in 2020, the annual investment return would have been 5.84 percent. This yearly return falls between the three percent inflation rate and the 10 percent return of the stock market during that era.

Andrew Meister sold his Comfortractor many years ago. He passed away in 2005 at the age of 91. He was buried in East Graceland Cemetery in Fairbury.

The Comfortractor was one of those brilliant ideas that were 30 years ahead of their time. By the late 1960s, almost all large tractors came equipped with comfortable cabs. Today's cabs have all the creature comforts that are seen in automobiles. Many of today's tractor cabs have more electronics than a car to help perform more efficient farming.









## **CHAPTER 18**

### **What Happened to the Route 24 Deer?**

Arthur Roy Melvin was born in 1912 in Wing, Illinois. He was the son of Arthur Clyde Melvin and Mae Janette Cottrell. Roy attended and graduated from Chatsworth High School. He then graduated from Illinois State Normal University.

As a boy in the 1930s, Roy adopted the hobby of being a ham radio operator. He was one of the first ham radio operators in the Fairbury area.

Roy Melvin married Mabel Clarice Jarvis in 1936 in Forrest. Roy then taught mathematics at Sheridan High School, about 65 miles north of Fairbury. During World War II, Roy worked for the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company.

Henry Streib was a sixth-grade elementary teacher in Fairbury. In June of 1928, he converted the vacant lot just west of his gas and oil station into a tourist park. Henry also erected two small cottages for tourist rental.

Harry P. Klopfenstein was born in 1903 in Gridley, Illinois. Harry became a leading Fairbury businessman. He operated the Klopfenstein Motor Company for 22 years in Fairbury. Harry was also the Mayor of Fairbury from 1942-1946.

The Streib gas station was sold a couple of times. At some point, Harry Klopfenstein purchased the site on the west edge of Fairbury on Route 24. This site included a Standard Oil gas station and a hotel consisting of several stand-alone cabins.

In April of 1946, Roy Melvin leased the gas station and cabins from Harry Klopfenstein. Mr. Melvin then moved his family from Sheridan to Fairbury. Roy began to operate the gas station and the hotel. Modifications were made to connect the stand-alone cabins into a continuous building. A small restaurant was also established next to the gas station.

After operating the gas station and hotel for three years, Roy Melvin purchased the gas station and hotel from Harry Klopfenstein in 1949. The hotel was commonly called "Melvin's Hotel." In 1951, Roy started to lease the restaurant to Mrs. Ben Sutter. She had been working at this restaurant for four years as the evening cook. Roy and his wife continued to operate the service station and hotel.

Roy moved his ham radio set-up to the lobby of the hotel. The hotel customers enjoyed hearing stories about the people that Roy communicated with by ham radio in faraway places.

In 1953, Roy Melvin started to lease the gas station to the Soon-Vacuum Oil Company. The building that housed the station and the cafe had a complete exterior face-lift. A new concrete service apron and stone driveway were installed. A new lighting system was also installed.

In August of 1953, the Fairbury-Cropsey school system hired two new math teachers. These new teachers were Roy Melvin and Roberta Herzog. They both began teaching at Fairbury in the Fall of 1953.

Postcards to advertise the hotel were printed and distributed. One of these postcards noted that Melvin's Hotel was in Central Illinois on U.S. Highway 24. This hotel had 15 clean and modern units with baths, a hot water heating system, and innerspring mattresses. Adjacent to the hotel was a restaurant and gas station. The hotel was a member of the United Motor Courts National Credit Card Incorporation. The traveler noted that he spent \$8.00 for a night's stay at the hotel on this particular postcard.

In 1964, Merlin "Shorty" Harris and his wife purchased the Melvin Hotel from Roy Melvin and his wife. Mr. Harris was from Colfax, and he lived both in Colfax and Fairbury during his lifetime. The name was changed from Melvin's Hotel to the Indian Trail Motel. Mr. and Mrs. Harris began to manage the hotel and restaurant.

In 1968, Mr. Harris leased the Pure truck stop at Towanda, Illinois. They continued to operate the Indian Trail Motel in Fairbury. They then added a Paxton restaurant to their business holdings.

In 1966, Mr. Harris traveled to Wisconsin and purchased a large fiberglass deer. This deer was 18 feet long and 15 feet high. Mr. Harris first installed this deer at his Towanda restaurant. A bib was added to the deer since it was advertising the Towanda restaurant.

In 1970, Mr. Harris moved the large deer from his Towanda restaurant to the Indian Trail Motel on Route 24 in Fairbury. The deer continued to wear his bib while he was on display in Fairbury.

In 1990, Mrs. Harris died. Mr. Harris continued to operate the Indian Trails Motel. In 1992, Merlin Harris decided to sell the hotel and associated land to the McDonald's Corporation. A new McDonald's fast-food restaurant was erected on this site.

The deer was sold to Carl Kieser. He transported the giant deer to his Gibson City Fishing and Camping Club. This site is two miles south of Gibson City and a half-mile east of U.S. Route 47.

In 2007, Mr. Kieser created a company named Aquatic Control of Illinois. He advertised and sold a product called Pond Clear Plus. This product was advertised to control lake weeds and algae "Mother Nature's Way," with "No Chemicals." It proclaimed that a biological method with live bacteria was used to dissolve plant nutrients, black muck, and rotten egg odor. This product was very successful, and Mr. Kieser sold over \$400,000 worth of this product.

Mr. Kieser then ran into serious problems with the law. The first issue he had was a failure to pay any income taxes on the product's sales. The second issue he had was the product contained Diuron 80DF. The warning label for this product stated the product should not be applied directly to water due to its toxicity to fish and other aquatic wildlife. Carl Kieser is currently incarcerated at the Cumberland, Maryland, federal prison with an estimated release date of April of 2021. The deer is still in good condition and is located at the Gibson City Fishing and Camping Club.

This giant deer was a Fairbury landmark from 1970 until 1992. Many Fairbury residents fondly remember the "deer with a bib" who invited visitors to spend the night at the Indian Trail Motel.



Mervin "Shorty" Harris standing in front of the Indian Trails Motel with the landmark deer with a bib in 1992



Deer at Gibson City fishing camp in 2019





## **CHAPTER 19**

### **David versus Goliath in Fairbury**

In 1939, Ray Kroc became the exclusive distributor of the Multimixer milkshake machine. Mr. Kroc became intrigued when he discovered a restaurant in California had purchased six of his devices. Ray Kroc visited the restaurant owned by the McDonald brothers in California. The McDonald brothers had developed a restaurant with a simple menu of burgers, fries, and milkshakes. Ray Kroc liked their business model, and he became the franchise agent for the McDonald brothers. Mr. Kroc opened the first restaurant for McDonald's System, Inc., a predecessor of the McDonald's Corp. in Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955. In 1961, the McDonald's Corp. bought out the McDonald brothers for \$2.7 million. This transaction amount would be equivalent to \$23.4 million in today's dollars.

Just one year after Ray Kroc opened his first McDonald's fast-food restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois, Earl and Dorothy McDonald opened their sit-down restaurant in a rented, white frame building on U.S. Highway 24 in Fairbury. After being in business for 14 years, Earl and Dorothy received their first of many ominous letters from the McDonald's Corp. in 1970. The first letter warned the Fairbury McDonalds never to use arches or switch to a drive-in format.

Eventually, Ronald McDonald, the son of Earl and Dorothy, took over running the Fairbury restaurant. Ironically, the McDonald's Corp. created their clown mascot "Ronald McDonald" in 1963.

After Ronald McDonald and his wife, Sue, took over running the Fairbury restaurant, Ron maintained a folder where he put all the written letters and records of the phone calls that they had received from the McDonald's Corporation. Each communication from the large corporation was meant to strongly remind them of McDonald's corporation's determination to protect its trademark and copyrights.

In the early 1990s, McDonald's Corp. found that the larger American cities were saturated with many different fast-food restaurants. To keep the

company growing, McDonald's decided to start opening restaurants in smaller towns.

In January of 1992, things began to get interesting for the McDonald's Fairbury restaurant. A Blade story recounted the old Indian Trail Motel on Route 24 had been sold to the McDonald's Corp, and their trademark "Golden Arches" would be appearing at a new restaurant in Fairbury.

In that era, many different Fairbury community groups held their meetings in the large banquet room in the Fairbury McDonald's restaurant basement. When the Rotary Club had their meeting in the basement, guest speaker Stanley "Stash" Drassler announced he would be the franchise owner of a new McDonald's restaurant just one mile west of the restaurant he was then sitting in. Mr. Drassler already owned McDonald's outlets in the nearby towns of Watseka and Gilman.

On February 4, 1993, the old Indian Trail motel was demolished. One week later, groundbreaking ceremonies for the future McDonald's fast-food restaurant took place on a cold, windy morning. The Fairbury citizens who attended were Maurice Steidinger, President of the Fairbury Association of Commerce; Lynn Dameron, Fairbury Mayor; Manny Steffen, the realtor who sold the property; and Lucille Steffen, wife of Manny Steffen. Representing the new restaurant's ownership and management were owner Stan "Stash" Drassler and the first manager, Tony Gardner. The McDonald's corporate headquarter's representative was Peggy Kennelly.

About a week after the groundbreaking ceremony, problems with union picketers occurred on the new fast-food McDonald's restaurant's construction site. Union picketers were protesting the use of non-union labor on the construction of the new restaurant. The number of picketers increased to 75 people, and construction was halted. Twenty-one-year old picketer Steve Kupfer, of Eureka, told police that he was struck by the pick-up truck of subcontractor Jeff Kilgus of rural Fairbury. Fairbury Police Chief Sam Hedrick investigated and found that picketers had chased the truck of Kilgus, and one picketer jumped on the hood of the pick-up. Windows were broken on excavation equipment and the construction trailer. Telephone lines to the trailer were cut and spikes placed on the ground.

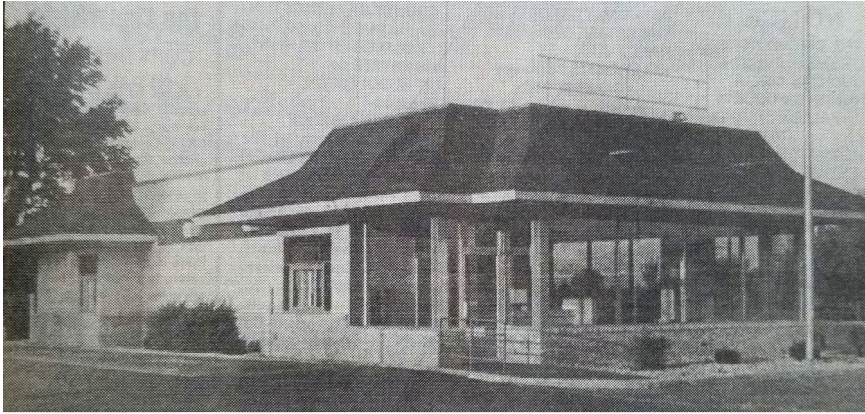
Eventually, the union picketing issues were resolved, and the restaurant was built. The grand opening ceremony was held on May 25, 1993. The highest-ranking Illinois state official attending the ceremony was Illinois Secretary of State George Ryan. Mr. Ryan went on to become the Illinois Governor in 1998. George Ryan was later convicted of federal corruption charges and spent more than five years in federal prison and seven months of home confinement. He was released from federal prison on July 3, 2013.

The McDonald's fast-food restaurant had a relatively short life in Fairbury. It closed in July of 1996 after being open for three years and two months. The owner, Mr. Drassler, declined to comment about the reason for closing the restaurant. A McDonald's corporate representative said it was the franchise owner's decision, not the corporation. In that era, very few McDonald's restaurants were closed. Due to the David and Goliath similarity between the small family-owned restaurant and the large corporation, the fast-food restaurant's closing was published in many of the country's major newspapers.

The Chicago Tribune quoted some anonymous Fairbury citizens concerning why the restaurant closed. These citizens told the reporter that the closure was because of a couple of unsavory people who hung out at the restaurant. These unsavory characters drove away local customers. One local observer recounted that "There was this one guy, in particular, a local strongman who is hell for hire and has the body odor to go with it. He drove everybody off." A McDonald's corporate spokesman said the restaurant was not producing enough business. The spokesman said the corporation was not very good at site selection when they selected Fairbury. The spokesman said the corporation got better over time with regards to successful site selection.

The Fairbury fast-food restaurant building was sold and remodeled into the Fairbury branch of the First State Bank of Forrest. Chenoa announced their new restaurant just two months after the Fairbury restaurant closed.

The McDonald's sit-down restaurant was recently sold, and the name changed to Diner 24. Interestingly, there are still McDonald's fast-food restaurants operating in Watseka, Gilman, and Chenoa.



McDonald's fast-food restaurant in Fairbury shortly after it closed in 1996. The Golden Arches and other signs were removed within hours of its closure

## **CHAPTER 20**

### **Dave's Supermarket Still Going Strong at 70 Years**

Peter Steffen was born in 1830 in Eggiwill, Switzerland, about 21 miles southeast of Bern. He emigrated from Switzerland to the Vera Cruz, Indiana, area in 1850. Vera Cruz is about 42 miles south of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Peter Steffen was one of the pioneer farmers in Central Indiana.

In 1855, at the age of 25, Peter Steffen married Anna Barbara Strahm. Anna was also born in Switzerland, and she was 30 years of age when she married Peter Steffen. Peter and Anna Steffen had seven children in Vera Cruz, Indiana.

One of the children of Peter and Anna Steffen was Nathaniel Steffen (1868-1927). Nathaniel married Louisa Bahler (1858-1929). They had seven children and eventually moved to Elgin, Illinois.

Jonathan D. Steffen (1896-1984) was one of Nathaniel's seven children. Jonathan Steffen married Ida Wewetzer (1897-1980). Jonathan and Ida Steffen had eight children. Their oldest child was David William Steffen, and he was born in Elgin in 1920. The second oldest child of Jonathan and Ida Steffen was Melvin N. Steffen, born in 1921. All of the children of Jonathan and Ida Steffen grew up in Elgin, Illinois.

In 1926, Frank Duell built a new building in Fairbury. This structure became known as the Duell Building. It was designed to have walls dividing the building into five different business locations. The first tenant was the U.S. Post Office, located in the south slot in the building. Various businesses occupied the other four spaces over the years.

The first job Dave Steffen had was to sack potatoes at the Paradise Market grocery store in Elgin. Dave eventually became a buyer and stockman for that grocery store. Dave Steffen then served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was stationed in England during the war. Dave finished his service with the rank of Staff Sergeant.

After the war ended, Dave and his younger brother Melvin owned the Steffen Bros. grocery store in Deer Creek, Illinois. Through church friends, Dave Steffen met Miss Emma Lou Huber from Fairbury. In November of 1947, it was announced at the Christian Apostolic Church at Goodfield that both Dave Steffen and his brother Melvin Steffen were getting married. Dave Steffen married Emma Lou Huber from Fairbury, and Melvin Steffen married Miss Leona Wiegand of Forrest.

In the 1940s, Fairbury had nine different grocery stores or meat markets. Most of these were small neighborhood stores. The nine grocery stores were Frank's Market, Harper's Grocery, Hotaling's Grocery, Walton's Grocery, Kroger's Grocery, Werling's Meat Market, Rabe's Grocery, City Meat Market, and Little Joe's Grocery.

If a business consultant studied the grocery store business in Fairbury in the late 1940s, the consultant would have probably recommended not opening a new grocery store because there were too many competitors already established.

Undaunted by all the competing businesses, Dave and Emma Stephen decided to open a new grocery store in Fairbury in 1950. They chose the south end of the Duell building, which the Post Office had recently vacated. The Post Office moved to the building at the northeast corner of Locust and Second Streets.

Over the following years, Dave and Emma Steffen kept expanding their store until they eventually occupied the entire Duell building. The number of competing grocery stores dwindled steadily over time. Dave's Supermarket outlasted the other nine competitors and became the only grocery store in Fairbury.

Three of the significant threats to the long-term life of a business are physical damage to the facilities, the passing of the company from the founders to subsequent generations, and the failure to adapt to changing markets. In August of 1979, Dave's Supermarket had a "near-miss" experience with a major derailment of the TP&W train next to the Duell building. Eleven cars of a 94-car freight train derailed in downtown Fairbury next to Dave's Supermarket. Seven vehicles, a semi-trailer, a

motorcycle, and a bicycle were damaged. Dave Steffen's car stopped a semi-trailer, which in turn stopped one of the derailed freight cars. The train car might have otherwise crashed into the crowded supermarket full of shoppers. Fortunately, no one was injured in the derailment. The Blade headline for this derailment was "The Miracle on Third Street." It was indeed a miracle because the derailment could have easily wiped out the entire grocery store and injured many shoppers.

The second major threat to a business is the transition that occurs when the founders pass along the company to the next generation. Many family-owned businesses fail because the business is not passed along successfully to subsequent generations. Fortunately, the Steffen family has handled the generational transfer of their business very successfully. Dave Steffen passed away in 2010 at the age of 90. Today, the company is managed using a team approach with the second and third generations of the family.

The third major threat to any business is the changing of technology and customer needs. Dave's Supermarket has identified and adapted to each technology change that has occurred over the years. They also have periodically remodeled their store, so it always has a modern appearance.

The most recent technology change is the customers' ability to order their groceries online and then pick them up. When store employees receive an online customer order, they quickly fill the order and have the groceries ready for customer pick-up.

One customer service feature that has not changed over the years is grocery delivery to the customer's vehicle by grocery delivery employees. Very few grocery stores still offer this service to their customers.

After 70 years in business, Dave's Supermarket continues to have a strong business and attracts customers from many miles away. Every day they continue to fulfill their motto of "Wowing the Customer" with their products and services.



Melvin Steffen, left side, and Dave Steffen, right side, with their Deer Creek delivery truck circa 1948.



## **CHAPTER 21**

### **First Fairbury Area Family Arrived 190 Years Ago**

Hugh Steers was born in 1756 in Cork, Ireland. He emigrated from Ireland to the United States and then served as a soldier in the Revolutionary War. His first major battle was in 1771 against Native Americans who were friendly to the British. The Native Americans won the battle, and Hugh Steers was taken as a prisoner. Hugh was kept captive by the Native Americans until his freedom was negotiated with the Shawnee nation in 1773. After the War ended, Hugh Steers married Mary Fowler in Kentucky. They had a large family of 11 children in Boone County, Kentucky. One of their children, Rachel Steers, was born in 1793.

Valentine Martin Darnall was born in Virginia in 1797. At the age of 20, Valentine married Rachel Steers in Boone County, Kentucky, in 1818. Rachel was 25 years old when she married Valentine Darnall. They had six children in Kentucky.

In 1830, Valentine was 33 years old, and his wife Rachel was 37 years old. They decided to move their family of six children west to Illinois. They chose to move and set up a farm south of what is now Fairbury. Central Illinois was the last part of Illinois to be settled.

In October of 1830, the Darnall family started their trek from Boone County, Kentucky, to what is now Indian Grove Township. The trip took several weeks. They made the journey with an old-fashioned scooped bed wagon, which had a tremendous capacity for carrying household goods. Four horses drew their wagon, and this horse team struggled to pull the heavy wagon through the deep mud they encountered. The Darnall family arrived at their new home on October 27, 1830.

The first priority for Valentine Darnall was to build a log cabin for his family. Mr. Valentine built their first log cabin using the only tool he owned, an ax. The house was finished by November 1, 1830. The Darnall family spent their first winter in this log cabin.

The next major challenge the Darnall family faced was the terrible winter of 1830-1831. This winter came to be known as the winter of the "great snow." The food supply for the Darnall family was about to run out. Mr. Darnall decided to travel by horseback to a small settlement at Mackinaw to purchase more provisions. Shortly after Valentine Darnall arrived at Mackinaw, heavy snow began to fall with calm winds. The snow kept falling until it reached a depth of four feet. Once the snow stopped, a drizzling rain turned to sleet. Intensely cold weather moved in, and the country was covered with a sheet of ice overlaying the snow.

The weather conditions made it impossible to travel by horseback. Mr. Darnall was forced to remain at Mackinaw for five days with the knowledge that his family was suffering for food. They could not even obtain the wild game for the snow had killed all wild things and buried them under its white blanket.

Mr. Darnall finally made his perilous journey back to his cabin on horseback over the ice-crusting snow. On the front of the saddle, Mr. Darnall had the carcass of a deer, while fastened to his saddle's back were the much-needed provisions.

The last native American Indian tribe who lived in the Fairbury area were the Kickapoo. In the early 1800s, they had a settlement at Leroy, Illinois. In 1828, about 700 Kickapoo moved from Leroy to about four miles southwest of present-day Fairbury. In 1830, the 630 tribe members moved to Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth. The Chatsworth settlement had a council house, 97 wigwags, and several small encampments.

The Kickapoo tribe members still frequented the area where the Darnall family chose to settle. Valentine Darnall tried to deal fairly and honestly with the Kickapoo he encountered. The Kickapoo gave him the name of the "good shomoki man," meaning the good white man.

During the terrible winter of 1830-1831, the Kickapoo realized the Darnall family was running low on food. They gave the Darnall family some brown beans to eat. The family could also grow more food next spring.

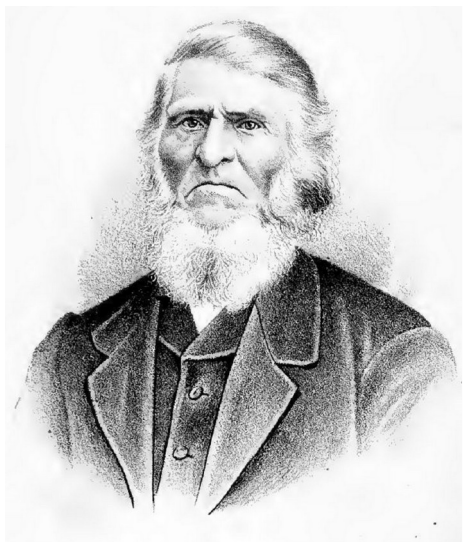
The story was often recited that Mrs. Darnall once asked an old Chief if he and his tribesmen would kill them if an uprising should occur. The old Chief is said to have replied, "Oh yes, but we kill them quickly," meaning that they would not be tortured.

In 1832, the Black Hawk war made it necessary for Mr. Darnall to temporarily move his family to Mackinaw for safety. After peace was declared, the family returned to their log cabin and farm.

In 1930, a huge celebration was held at the W. D. Spence farm commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Valentine and Rachel Darnall's family settling south of Fairbury. One hundred forty-four direct descendants attended the festivities. Lunch was served at noon for the hundreds of direct descendants and friends. The Fairbury high school band played, and numerous speeches were given.

One of the most exciting and enjoyable features of the day was the "Style Show." Twelve young ladies and two young men, all of whom were either grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. Darnall, got dressed in old clothing. The children then passed in review, wearing various periods of dress worn within the past 100 years. These different articles of wearing apparel had been resurrected from old trunks and attics and were genuine articles. Among them were long dresses and balloon sleeves, ruffles and flounces, skin-fitting men's trousers, high hats, etc. A group photograph of the direct descendants was taken. The only two attendees from the Fairbury area in the 1930 photo known to be still alive include Marilyn Payne-Wells and her brother Howard Payne.

The Darnall family was the first pioneer settlers of the Fairbury area and Livingston County. Many descendants of the Darnall family still live in the Fairbury area. The original homestead is still owned by family descendants 190 years after Valentine and Rachel Steers came to Fairbury.



Valentine Martin Darnall and his wife Rachel Steers. They were the first pioneer settlers in the Fairbury area in 1830.

## **CHAPTER 22**

### **Disc Sharpening One of Fairbury's Longest Lasting Businesses**

The Fairbury Aaron family traces back to the early 1700s when the family emigrated from Alsace, France, to Pennsylvania. The family remained in Pennsylvania until Thomas Henry Aaron (1826-1911) moved to the Chatsworth, Illinois, area.

Thomas Henry Aaron married Mary Theresa Lilly, and they had four children. He was one of the pioneer farmers in the Chatsworth area. One of Thomas and Mary's children was George B. Aaron (1865-1939). George married Catherine O'Neill, and they lived in the Chatsworth area.

One grandson of George B. Aaron was Thomas Harold Aaron (1934-2017). Thomas was born in Strawn, and he graduated from Strawn High School in 1953. Thomas H. Aaron served his country in the United States Army and was stationed in Korea for active duty from 1954 to 1956. After his military service, Thomas began working for Pittsburgh International, and he ended up working there for 30 years. Thomas married Estella Lee Schove, and they had four children.

A disc is an agricultural implement used to till the soil where crops are to be planted. Discs are also used to chop up unwanted weeds or crop remainders. The cutting edges on the disc are rows of concave metal discs set at an angle to the direction of travel. The steel discs lose their sharp edge over time and must be sharpened or replaced with new discs.

One day, Thomas Aaron was working as a gas station attendant at the Hick's station on Route 24 in Fairbury. He struck up a conversation with a customer who needed gasoline. The customer, from Sycamore, Illinois, told Thomas that he sharpened the disc blades for farmers. Sycamore is 100 miles north of Fairbury, by DeKalb, Illinois. The customer said he had so much business north of Sycamore that he could no longer service farmers in Central Illinois. Thomas investigated the disc sharpening business and found that original equipment dealers did not offer this

service. Thomas Aaron decided to start his own disc sharpening business in 1961.

One obstacle to starting his disc sharpening business was that Thomas had to invent and manufacture specialized machines to sharpen the blades. Thomas developed a process to sharpen the disc blades while they were still assembled to the disc. Thomas created a process that did not grind or heat the edges. His method used a carbide tool to shave off three-eighths of an inch from the outside of the disc. The process that Thomas developed was approved by the companies that originally manufactured the tillage equipment. Over the years, Thomas also developed methods for sharpening the blades of soil rippers and chisel plows.

Thomas Aaron worked full-time at Pittsburgh International from 4 PM until midnight. He would get home after midnight and then talk to people around the world on his ham radio. Before dawn, he would often leave Fairbury and drive to three or four farms to sharpen discs. Thomas would arrive back in Fairbury at 3 PM, take a quick nap, then report to work at Pittsburgh International. On Saturdays and Sundays, Thomas could often provide his disc sharpening service to five or six farmers each day.

Thomas found there were two different seasons where farmers wanted their discs sharpened. The first season was from early August to the middle of November. The second season was from February to April. Thomas averaged about 260 sharpening jobs per year. The farthest he traveled was 100 miles, and he never stayed overnight in a motel.

Thomas Aaron often had difficulty finding the correct farm for a customer. Back in that era, the country roads were not numbered like they are today. One time, Thomas had a customer in rural Odell. He asked a young neighbor boy if his customer lived in the next house down the road. The young boy told him he had the correct farm. Thomas went to the farm and sharpened the disc blades. A day or two later, the customer called Thomas and complained he had not shown up to sharpen his disc blades. Thomas discovered he had gone to the wrong farm.

The advent of no-till farming reduced the number of discs used by farmers. To cope with the reduction in the number of discs, Thomas expanded his business's geographic range and remained busy.

Thomas was unique in that he could function well on less than four hours of sleep a night. He loved hunting and found time to hunt deer and bears in Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois. He had several of his deer and one bear stuffed and on display in his home.

Thomas served in the Fairbury V.F.W. Post as Commander and he was a past President of the Fairbury Sportsman's Club. Thomas was also a longtime member of the Fairbury Fire Department. After running the Aaron Disc Sharpening Service for 35 years, Thomas retired from that business in 1996. His son, Terry Aaron, continued the business after Thomas retired. Thomas Aaron died in 2017 at the age of 82. He was buried in the Strawn Cemetery.

Terry Aaron continues to operate the disc sharpening business. In 2021, the disc sharpening business will celebrate 60 years in business. Today's discs are more massive, and typically they require about four hours to sharpen all the discs. The average charge is about \$6 per blade. The business serves customers who live in eastern Iowa, Illinois, southern Wisconsin, and western Indiana. This year, they have received requests from farmers in western Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri for their disc sharpening services.

The business still utilizes the simple three-by-five index card system that Thomas Aaron developed. Each card has information about past customers, including their contact information, what type of equipment they have, and the last sharpening date. This simple database has hundreds of index cards representing six decades of customers. The business maintains a web site, and Terry Aaron can be contacted at 815-692-3276.

This unique small business has been serving farmers in four states for six decades. What started as a conversation at Hick's gas station in 1961 turned into one of the longest-lasting companies in Fairbury history.



Thomas Aaron sharpening disc blades in 1996.



## **CHAPTER 23**

### **1933 Tragic Murder Still Unsolved**

Sam Houston Wells was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1889. In 1909, Sam married Adeline Elizabeth Heald from Chatsworth in 1909. Sam and Adeline Wells settled in the Wing area, northeast of Fairbury. They had a large family of nine children. The last surviving member of the nine children was James Wells. He passed away in Fairbury in 2019. Many descendants of these nine children still live in the Fairbury area.

One of Sam and Adeline's nine children was Lola Ellen Wells. She was born in 1914 in Wing. Lola attended school in Saunemin. In high school, fellow students voted Lola the most beautiful girl in her high school. She also won a personality contest. Lola graduated with the class of 1930.

After high school, Lola decided to become a nurse. She enrolled in the student nurse program at St. Joseph's Hospital in Bloomington. With nine children, the Sam Wells family was not wealthy. They could not afford to buy Lola a car. On weekends, Lola often hitch-hiked the 50 miles from Bloomington to her parent's home in Wing.

While at nursing school, Lola started dating Max Lockenvitz Jr. He was the son of Max and Anna Lockenvitz. Max was born in Bloomington in 1910. In 1930, Max was living with his parents in Bloomington. Max was a material messenger at the Bloomington railroad shop.

On Monday afternoon, February 27, 1933, Lola Wells went missing at nursing school. When she did not return to the hospital for duty Monday night, or Tuesday morning, hospital officials notified her parents the 20-year-old girl was missing.

Law enforcement officials interviewed Lola's boyfriend, Max Lockenvitz. He did not know where she was. Days turned into weeks and months. In late April, the body of a woman was found floating in the Illinois River near Chillicothe. The body was discovered by the Peoria North Shore Country Club grounds caretaker. He found the body floating head up, which indicated the women had not drowned.

The Peoria County coroner held an inquest, and an initial verdict of "unknown person drowned in an unknown manner" was returned. The coroner thought it was likely a case of suicide. He publicized the unidentified body's discovery in local newspapers. Several people viewed the body and attempted to identify it. Peoria officials were to the point of giving up, and they were going to bury the body as an unidentified Jane Doe.

A newspaper story about the unidentified body was noticed by Orville Wells of Forrest, nephew of Sam Wells, the father of missing Lola. Orville and Sam Wells drove to Peoria to identify the body. The body was severely decomposed because it had been in the river for weeks.

Sam Wells thought the body was likely to be his daughter Lola. Sam went home and got his daughter's dental records from Dr. Pyper in Pontiac. Sam picked up Miss Mildred Morrow from Gilman, a room-mate to Lola, and drove back to the Webber Funeral Home in Chillicothe. Fellow student nurses Miss Marie Brandt of Atlanta and Miss Ruby Adams of Heyworth, also went to see the body.

The body had a fountain pen in a purse fastened to the body under the dress belt. Lola had lost this pen a few days before she disappeared. Sister Rufina, the head nurse, found the pen and returned it to Lola. Sister Rufina, head nurse, verified the pen found on the body was Lola's.

The student nurses who viewed the body thought the red skirt, tan blouse, and black stockings matched Lola's appearance when she announced she was going for a walk after lunch on Monday. Lola was last seen walking north from the hospital on Morris Avenue.

Dr. Dew of Chillicothe used the dental records to verify the body was Lola. Her body was taken to the Mowery funeral home in Fairbury. The undertakers at the Mowery funeral home found no water in the lungs of Lola. In a drowning case, the lungs are usually full of water. There were also no marks of external violence to the body.

Because Lola's body was found floating head up and there was no water in her lungs, Lola's parents requested an autopsy. The autopsy was performed

by the same doctors from St. Joseph Hospital that helped to train Lola. Samples were also sent to the lab to determine if Lola had been drugged or poisoned.

Another inquest into the death of Lola was held. The autopsy results and the lab results were inconclusive as to the cause of Lola's death. Kenneth Wells, brother of Lola, testified that she and boyfriend Max Lockenvitz had an argument on the Sunday preceding her disappearance. Max Lockenvitz Jr., 23 years old, denied that a lovers' quarrel occurred on the eve of Lola's disappearance.

Kenneth Wells also testified that Lola often hitch-hiked her way from the hospital in Bloomington to the home of her father, Sam Wells, in Wing. He suggested a motorist had killed her and thrown the body in the river.

Funeral services were held at the Methodist Church in Wing. Six nurses from St. Joseph Hospital attended the services in uniform. The pallbearers were from her Saunemin graduation class. Several of Lola's patients came to her funeral because they had liked Lola's cheerful disposition and excellent care she provided.

Max Lockenvitz married Lillian Nicholson in 1936 when he was 26 years old. Max and Lillian Lockenvitz had no children. Max worked 41 years as a machinist for Eureka-Williams Co. and retired in 1974. His wife worked at State Farm. Max died in 1990. He and his wife were buried in the Park Hill Mausoleum in Bloomington.

The case of Lola Wells is still unsolved after more than 85 years. After Lola's body was found in 1933, the Blade editor noted it was very likely we would never know how she met her death, or what caused her mysterious disappearance. Her parents had only the satisfaction of knowing that her body had been found and laid to rest.



Lola Wells (1914-1933)

## **CHAPTER 24**

### **Kay Spence Nationally Famous Horse Trainer**

Malachi Spence (1769-1847) and his son, James, moved from Tennessee to a farm south of Fairbury in 1834. They were some of the first settlers to come to the Fairbury area. James Spence married Susannah Rishton Callahan from Tennessee. James and Susannah Spence had a large family. One of their sons, born south of Fairbury, was Cary Spence (1840-1889). Cary Spence married Elizabeth McCollough.

Cary and "Lizzie" Spence also had a large family with seven children. Unfortunately, Cary Spence died in 1889 when he was just 49 years old. The obituary for Cary Spence recounted that Carey was his own worst enemy. Although Carey came from a family of eminent respectability and high moral standing in the community, Carey Spence fell victim to the snares of the cup. His obituary noted that Carey's death was attributable to the excessive use of strong drink. After his death, Lizzie Spence, at the age of 46, had to raise their seven children.

One of Carey and Lizzie Spence's seven children was Cary Kay Spence (1880-1937). He was commonly referred to as Kay Spence and was nine years old when his father died. Kay developed an early interest in training racehorses. He married Burnette B. Hapner from Ohio. Kay and Burnette Spence had no children.

When Kay Spence was 20 years old in 1900, the Blade reported that he was the owner of a racehorse named Prairie King. The Blade recounted that Kay would spend the winter in Fairbury, and his horse would winter in Iowa.

In 1901, Kay Spence was issued an official license to be a trainer of racing horses. By 1903, Kay was running a horse he owned in St. Louis. In 1905, Kay Spence sold a contract he had with a jockey to another horse owner.

In 1906, it was alleged that Kay Spence was involved in a scheme to get another man's horse disqualified so his horse would win the race. It was alleged that someone working for Kay Spence poured Clorox into the race

horse's mouth. After an extensive investigation, Kay Spence was cleared of the charges and allowed to resume training racehorses.

Kay Spence not only trained horses and jockeys, but he also bet on the horse races. In 1907, Kay was at the Louisville, Kentucky, race track. He decided to bet on a horse named Joaquin, who was the favorite, and paying even money. When Kay pulled out his wallet to get the money to place the bet, something fell out of his wallet onto the ground. Kay stooped down and picked up the item. The item turned out to be a Chinese laundry ticket. Kay rechecked the race line-up and saw that a horse named Wing Ting with ten to one odds was in the race. Kay thought he had received a "hunch" that he could not overlook. Kay Spence bet on Wing Ting, and that horse easily won. Kay Spence won \$1,000 on that hunch.

Kay Spence was the trainer for four different horses that competed in the Kentucky Derby. The first horse was named Hodge. In addition to training racehorses, Kay Spence decided he could train crows also. He taught his pet crow to yell, much as a bettor would. During the race at the 1914 Kentucky Derby, the crow sat on the backstretch rail and, during the race, called out, "Come on, Hodge!"

Unfortunately, the trained crow was not enough to get a win at the Kentucky Derby. Kay Spence's horse, Hodge, won second place in the 1914 Kentucky Derby. By 1918, Kay Spence and his wife were living in Louisville, Kentucky. On his World War I draft card, he reported that his occupation was a self-employed horseman.

In 1919, the Blade published an article about Fairbury native Kay Spence. The article recounted that Kay was in Havana, Cuba, with a string of 36 running horses. Kay often spent his winters in Cuba and his summers on the Kentucky race tracks. Kay Spence had become famous in the horseman's world through not only his ability as a trainer of horses but in the development of jockeys. For several years, Mr. Spence was located in Mexico, Missouri, where he was engaged in breeding and raising thoroughbred horses. The Blade article quoted a well-known sporting paper that proclaimed that Kay Spence was the leading trainer in America. Spence saddled 56 winners during that racing season.

In the 1922 Kentucky Derby, Spence's horse named Surf Rider finished seventh. In the 1923 Kentucky Derby, his horse named The Clown finished eighteenth.

Between 1924 to 1927, Kay Spence got to train a horse named Princess Doreen. She was a thoroughbred racehorse best known for being the top American female money-winner. After showing good form as a two-year-old, Princess Doreen improved to be her generation's best female racehorse for the next three seasons. Not only did she race males and win, but she did so carrying high weight (often up to 133 pounds) for four years.

Princess Doreen was a bay mare bred by John E. Madden at his stud farm, Hamburg Place, in Kentucky. She was sired by Spanish Prince, a British horse that won several major sprint races between 1910 and 1913, including the King's Stand Stakes at Royal Ascot and two editions of the July Cup. Kay Spence enjoyed training Princess Doreen. Spence said that Princess Doreen represented the pinnacle of his success.

The last horse that Kay Spence trained for the Kentucky Derby was named Gallant Knight. That horse won second place in the Derby in 1930. In 1932, Kay Spence returned to Fairbury to visit his sister, Goldie Spence Meeker, in Cropsey.

Kay Spence died of pneumonia in California in 1937. Kay was 57 years old when he passed away. Kay Spence was buried in Mountain View Cemetery in San Bernardino.

During his career, Kay Spence trained many famous jockeys. These jockeys included Harry Lunsford, Allen Aubechon, Tommy Murray, H. Schutte, G. Noel, Claude Hunt, and Eddie Martin. He worked for Bernard Jones, Audley Farm, and Montfort B. Jones. Between 1912 and 1937, Kay Spence had 1,078 winning horses that won total purses of \$1,536,593.

Kay Spence started with very humble beginnings in Fairbury. His alcoholic father passed away when he was just nine years old. Kay Spence became a nationally known thoroughbred horse trainer with four entrants in the Kentucky Derby.



Kay Spence in Louisville, KY, training a horse for the 1929  
Kentucky Derby



## **CHAPTER 25**

### **Unique Homes Outlasted Their Creator**

Carl Strandlund Jr. was born in 1899 into a family of inventors and engineers in Sweden. His grandfather was a Swedish inventor. Carl Jr. came to Moline, Illinois, with his parents in 1903 when he was four years old. His father, Carl Sr., took a job with Deere & Co. in Moline. Carl Sr. was an inventor and was eventually awarded over 300 U.S. Patents.

Carl Jr. graduated from Moline High School in 1917. Inspired by his father and grandfather, Carl took correspondence courses to become an engineer. In 1918, Carl Jr. got his first job with Deere & Co. in Moline. In subsequent years, Carl changed jobs. He moved to Minneapolis to work for Minneapolis-Moline, an agricultural equipment manufacturer. Carl then moved to Springfield, Ohio, and worked for the Oliver Farm Machinery Co. Carl was a shrewd businessman and was quickly promoted to the top levels of company management.

After working for more than 20 years in the agricultural equipment industry, Carl decided to change industries. He became an executive of the Vitreous-Enamel Products company in Cicero, Illinois. Carl developed a new market for the porcelain-enameled products his company manufactured. This new market was wall panels for gas stations. These wall panels used a porcelain material applied to a steel base frame.

During World War II, many commodities were rationed, including tires, gasoline, and steel. When the war ended, it took the government several years before they stopped the rationing of steel. Shortly after the war ended, Carl traveled to Washington, D.C., to lobby the government to allow his company to use more steel for their gas station panels. Government officials refused his request. Carl found that all the government officials were worried about the housing shortage created by millions of service members returning home after the war.

Carl Strandlund then got the idea of solving the housing shortage by manufacturing low-cost homes that used steel panels with a porcelain coating. He applied and received a patent for his concept. He named his

new houses Lustron homes. These would be two-bedroom homes made entirely from porcelainized steel. Carl's all-metal Lustron would be built from about 3,000 mass-produced parts. All of these parts would then be shipped to building lots and erected on concrete-slab foundations. When Strandlund told federal officials he could produce 100 Lustron homes a day, they were so impressed that they set him up with \$37 million in government loans and an Ohio production plant.

Government officials found the Lustron home idea very appealing because they were termite resistant, rust-resistant, and fire-proof. These houses would never need to be repainted, re-shingled, or re-roofed, and could be cleaned simply by hosing them down. With their range of baked-on decorator color options (aqua, pink, canary, and so forth), Lustron homes also had an attractive pop-modernist factor. These homes featured creative design touches like sliding pocket doors, abundant built-in shelving, and an ingenious radiant heating system. Women liked the combination dishwasher-clothes washer, and everyone was attracted to the \$7,000 price tag.

In 1947, Strandlund established the Lustron Corporation and accepted the first of several multi-million-dollar loans from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to get the production of Lustron houses underway. Two of these Lustron homes were constructed in Fairbury.

The first Lustron home was constructed just east of the Beach home on Hickory Street for Austin Harrington. Austin was involved in the horse business for many years in Fairbury. He had already built a large house at the northwest corner of Hickory and Seventh Streets. In 1949, at the age of 84, he decided to have a new Lustron home constructed on the lot he owned between his existing home and the Beach house. Jean McCoy and Son of Pontiac erected the house. The home was 35x31 feet in size or 1,085 square feet.

The Blade reported the home would be a gray color with white trim and a blue roof. The interior was ultramodern in every detail with push buttons to do practically everything. The living space was to be as scientifically conserved as space in a ship's stateroom.

Unfortunately, Austin Harrington died before the home was finished. The house has been modified so much over the years that it is not recognizable as a typical Lustron home viewing it from Hickory Street.

The second Lustron home in Fairbury was constructed for Mr. and Mrs. Paul Hambsch at 409 West Pine Street. Before occupying their new Lustron home on Pine Street, the Hambsch family lived at 501 South Fourth Street. Mr. Hambsch worked for Honeggers and had one daughter, Katherine, born in 1947. Mrs. Hambsch was very active in the Fairbury Woman's Club. This house still stands today, and it looks like a typical Lustron home as viewed from Pine Street.

Although Carl Strandlund was a genius, he could not figure out how to mass-produce the 3,000 parts required to build each home. The price tag for a Lustron home quickly rose from \$7,000 to \$11,000. Carl's factory could not keep up with the orders for the new houses.

The federal government foreclosed on Carl's company in 1950 and repossessed the factory he used to produce the Lustron homes. Carl Strandlund died in 1974 at the age of 75 in Minnesota. About 2,500 Lustron homes were built, with many of them in Illinois. Most of the homes outlived their inventor, Carl Strandlund. Fifty of these homes have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Although these homes fulfilled their promise of requiring little maintenance, they had their share of issues. Because the houses were built of custom components, they could not be easily modified or enlarged by local carpenters. The interior and exterior color schemes could never be changed. Objects could not be hung from the walls because they were steel coated ceramic panels.

Many small towns in Central Illinois have at least one Lustron home still standing. Their longevity is a tribute to Carl Strandlund's dream of providing low-cost housing that would last forever.



Lustron Home on Pine Street in Fairbury, Illinois

**Update in July of 2021**

This home was dis-assembled and moved to another state.



## **CHAPTER 26**

### **Wonderful Transition from City Dump to Beautiful Subdivision**

In 1862, John Marsh and his son Henry Marsh dug a shaft one mile west of Fairbury, and they discovered coal about 180 feet below the prairie. This event marked the first discovery of coal in Central Illinois, and it set off a coal mining boom in the entire state. Fairbury would eventually have five coal mines.

The largest and longest operating coal mine in Fairbury was located on South Seventh Street near the current entrance to the Timber Ridge Subdivision. This coal mine was unique because it was formed in 1885 as a cooperative venture by 25 coal miners. Among the cooperative members were John Monroe, Peter Monroe, Robert Roberts, John Finnegan, John Hetherington, David Price, R. J. McAllister, John McAllister, James Loughran, William Williams, Evan Williams, James Dailey, John Dailey, Joe McCurdy, and Joe Wright.

After 56 years of operation, this coal mine closed in 1941. Tunnel maps of this coal mine exist, and they show no tunnels under the current Timber Ridge subdivision. The tunnels ran along the west side of Seventh Street and south of the cemetery.

After this coal mine closed, many local citizens dumped their trash down the main shaft. Several current Fairbury citizens remember going with their father to the city dump to dispose of their waste.

In 1964, J. C. Ebach, Harvey Traub, and Carl Borngasser purchased the 80-acre tract where the old coal mine and city dump used to be. The three partners had plans to convert this tract into a new subdivision for Fairbury. They purchased the land from Elizabeth Ann Goudy (1917-1969). She was the daughter of world-class Fairbury motorcycle racer Carl Goudy. Carl

and his brother William Goudy were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998.

J.C. Ebach was a Fairbury real estate developer and a broker. Mr. Ebach was always coming up with new business ideas. Several of his friends recounted that he slept with a pad of paper and pencil on his nightstand. If he woke up in the middle of the night with a new business idea, he would quickly jot it down so he would not forget it.

Harvey Traub (1930-2017) was a well-known lawyer in Fairbury. Harvey was very active in community affairs. He was proud to be a founding member of SELCAS (South East Livingston County Ambulance Service). Harvey was a 32nd degree Mason and spent many memorable days driving sick children to the Shriner's Hospitals. He was also president of the Fairbury Hospital Board for many years.

Carl Borngasser was President of the Fairbury Savings & Loan Association. In the 1960s, the Savings & Loan made most of the mortgage loans in the Fairbury area.

Shortly after the three men purchased the land from Elizabeth Goudy, the State of Illinois announced they would be rebuilding a bridge. This bridge was on Route 24 over Indian Creek and just east of Fairbury. A lot of fill material would be needed to complete this project.

After J. C. Ebach heard about this new bridge, he woke up in the middle of the night and wrote down a great new idea. If the highway project got their fill dirt from their new subdivision site, the new neighborhood would be significantly enhanced by having a small lake. Contact was made with the construction personnel, and they agreed to dig the lake so they could have the fill material for the bridge project.

In July of 1964, the Blade published a photo of a Caterpillar bulldozer starting to dig the new pond. The Caterpillar dozer could haul 13 yards of dirt on each load. Construction officials estimated the project would require 70,000 yards of clay fill material. When they were done, the new subdivision would have a five-acre lake.

At the December 1966 Fairbury City Council meeting, approval was given to annex the new Timber Ridge subdivision into Fairbury city limits. The three partners decided to name the new subdivision Timber Ridge. There was already a subdivision called Timber Ridge in Lexington. It became slightly confusing to Pantagraph readers when both subdivisions ran real estate ads in the Pantagraph in the late 1960s.

The first ad in the Blade announcing the new Timber Ridge subdivision occurred in January of 1967. J. C. Ebach Realty sponsored this large ad. Included in the ad was a plot map illustrating about 30 building lots.

This ad was designed to overcome local citizens' perception that this was an old coal mining site that was last used as the city dump. The ad writer tried to portray the idea Native Americans initially used the area with the phrase, "The same beauty that is ours today must have been the view that was enjoyed by the Indians as they camped upon the crest of beautiful TIMBER RIDGE...And what a view it is!"

The ad writer also tried to invoke a memory of Abraham Lincoln with the phrase, "As we further move down the picturesque TIMBER RIDGE drive we are attracted by such landmarks as the majestic oak tree whose spreading limbs must have (says the noted forester, Neale Hanley) bent in the same winds that stirred the beard of Abraham Lincoln."

By August of 1967, water and other utilities were available for new home construction. The construction of the first home in Timber Ridge was started, and it was a "California Contemporary" style design. The initial phase of the Timber Ridge subdivision eventually filled up with new homes. Over the years, several expansions have increased the size of the subdivision.

Today, the Timber Ridge subdivision is a beautiful subdivision with a small lake and many large trees in the northwest portion. This subdivision made a remarkable transformation from an old coal mine and city dump to one of Fairbury's nicest residential areas.



Entrance sign to Timber Ridge Subdivision in 2021



## **CHAPTER 27**

### **Fairbury History Mysteries #1**

All small towns have some historical mysteries that are not yet solved. Fairbury has its fair share of history mysteries as well. One of the biggest mysteries is what happened to World War II sailor Glenn Lee Johnson. Glenn was assigned to the USS Sullivans in the Pacific Theatre. The Captain of the USS Sullivans sent a few men on a small boat to check out a nearby small island. When they reached the island, the crew left Glenn in charge of the small boat. The rest of the men scouted the island. When they returned, the little boat was still there, but there was no sign of Glenn. They searched for Glenn for a couple of days and finally gave up. He was declared missing in action. One year later, he was officially declared dead.

At the end of WWII, there was a famous photo on the cover of Life Magazine. It depicted a young sailor grabbing a nurse in New York City and kissing her. Many experts believe the kissing sailor was George Mendonsa. George was the quartermaster of the USS Sullivans. In a 2005 interview, George said he was told after the war that they had found the remains of Glenn Lee Johnson on the island, and he had been stabbed. A local descendant of Glenn continues to search for further information on what happened to the missing sailor.

The second biggest Fairbury history mystery is missing Civil War soldiers George Putnam and his brother Henry Putnam from Belle Prairie Township. In that war, you could legally hire a substitute to take your place in the military. George Putnam was supposed to be a substitute for William S. Cooper. George never joined his company in the 53rd IL US Infantry. Henry Putnam was supposed to be a substitute for George B. McCullough. He also never made it to his unit, the 31st US Infantry. It is likely another unit that was short on soldiers ordered them to fight with their group, then they were killed and buried in unmarked graves.

Another mystery is why the name of Fairbury was selected for our town. It is reported that railroad engineer Octave Chanute suggested calling it Pattonville after Caleb Patton, who founded the village. Nobody knows why Caleb Patton chose Fairbury as the name of our town.

Another commonly asked question is why Sunken Park is sunken 36 inches below the adjacent land. One theory was that the dirt was used to raise the rest of the town. If one walks the railroad tracks and then looks north and south, it is obvious this land had a high point, and the railroad chose this high point to lay the tracks. The most logical explanation is that the railroad excavated it to obtain fill dirt for the rail bed. Veterans Memorial Park was also initially sunken until volunteers filled it with soil and made it into a park in 1902.

At one time, Fairbury had five coal mines. The longest-running coal mine was the one located at the entrance to the Timber Ridge subdivision. That mine closed in 1941. Tunnel maps have only been found for the Timber Ridge coal mine. The location of the tunnel maps for the other four coal mines remains a mystery.

Avoca was a village started by the McDowell family about three miles north of Fairbury on Indian Creek. Historical research has determined there were three successive churches at Avoca. The first church was built in 1857. The third church was dismantled in 1935, and the lumber was used to construct new buildings at East Bay Camp in Bloomington.

Only two old photographs exist of one of these three churches. These two photographs show either the second or third church in that village. The search continues to find old photos of all three of these church buildings.

Another mystery is whether or not the famous lawman Bat Masterson worked in a Fairbury coal mine. An exhaustive study was done to determine how this story first got started. It all traced back to a March 27, 1952 article in the Blade. This article was titled ***Roots of Fairbury Buried Deeply in Coal Mines***. The reporter that wrote this article reported that a Fairbury coal miner had told Mr. R. A. McAllister that Bat Masterson worked briefly in the Marsh coal mine. The reporter also said that Mr. McAllister was the primary source for the article's coal mining information.

Upon his death in 1967, the Blade reported that Richard A. McAllister was a colorful and sometimes controversial figure in Fairbury history. As a young man, McAllister worked in the Fairbury coal mines. He was a

physically big man and played professional football before any formal leagues existed. Later in life, he was an Alderman and was the Postmaster of Fairbury. McAllister was likely telling a "tall tale" to the Blade reporter back in 1952. Two different studies have found that Bat Masterson couldn't have ever worked in a Fairbury coal mine.

Another mystery occurred during the lifetime of many current Fairbury citizens. Around 1900, a large meteorite that had fallen south of Fairbury was moved to the South Side School's northeast playground area. Ed Lovett, school Custodian and his brother-in-law Ed Moore, hired Bob Harris, house-mover, to move the meteorite. The meteorite was sixteen inches high and thirty-six inches in diameter.

In 1930, a piece was chipped off and sent to the University of Illinois for analysis. No report was ever received back from the U of I. In 1958, Dean Voorhees investigated the mystery. He determined that it would be the largest ever found in the United States if it indeed were a meteorite.

Many people who attended Edison remember this big rock in the playground. In 1965, Edison School was closed and sold. The building was torn down, and an apartment building now occupies that location. The current location of the schoolyard meteorite is unknown. If it really was a meteorite, it could be worth well over \$1 million in today's marketplace.



Meteorite streaking through the sky

## **CHAPTER 28**

### **Langstaff Family Met Area Medical Needs for Three Generations**

The Langstaff family is one of the oldest families in the United States. Their family tree traces back to 1620. In that year, they were among a group of New Hampshire families that were the first to occupy the State of New Jersey. Henry D. Langstaff (1754-1826) served as a Private in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

Henry D. Langstaff's son, Asa Langstaff (1787-1864), moved from Piscataway, New Jersey, to the Irville, Ohio, area. Asa Langstaff was a farmer in Ohio. One of Asa's sons, Henry Clay Langstaff (1816-1893), started to learn the cabinet maker's trade at the age of fifteen. In 1839, Henry married Miss Elsie Uhntemute.

Henry and Elsie Langstaff moved to Bloomington, Illinois, in 1849. For six years, Henry was employed in the machine shop of Flagg & Ewing in Bloomington. Henry then bought a farm near Colfax. He made a living as a farmer and carpenter. Henry retired to Lexington, Illinois, and died there in 1893.

One of the sons of Henry and Elsie Langstaff was Henry Wellington Langstaff. He was born in 1855 in Martin Township, near Colfax. In 1880, he married Miss Olive Williams of Lawndale Township. She was the only child of Reverend James B. Williams and Julia A. Powellson.

In 1881, at the age of 26, Henry W. Langstaff started to study medicine with Dr. Stiles of Lexington. He then attended Hahnemann Medical College in Chicago. After three years of study in Chicago, Henry graduated from medical school and started practicing medicine in Colfax, Illinois. He was a medical doctor in Colfax until he died in 1932.

Dr. Henry W. Langstaff and his wife Olive had three boys and one girl. One of their four children was Rubie Wellington Langstaff. He attended Colfax schools and then became a graduate of the Chicago Veterinary

College in 1910. He married Ella Getty in 1914. Dr. R. W. Langstaff practiced as a veterinarian in Colfax until he retired in 1950. In 1964, Dr. R. W. died in Colfax.

Another child of Dr. Henry W. Langstaff was Olive Glen Langstaff. He was born in 1890 in Colfax. Unfortunately, Olive Glen Langstaff died just seven days shy of his first birthday.

Elsie Josephine Langstaff was another child of Dr. Henry W. Langstaff. She married Guy O. Hedges. He was a postal employee in Colfax. Guy and Elsie had two girls. Unfortunately, Guy suddenly became very ill and died at only 33 years of age. Elsie J. Langstaff then married Dr. George W. Sargeant, a Bloomington dentist. Elsie passed away in 1980.

The oldest child of Dr. Henry W. Langstaff was James Hartzell Langstaff Sr. He was born in Colfax in 1883 and attended the public schools. James then attended Illinois Medical College, now a part of Loyola University. He interned at West Suburban Hospital in Chicago. James graduated from medical school in 1903. He started practicing medicine in Roberts, Illinois, in 1903.

In July of 1905, Dr. James H. Langstaff Sr. married Miss Martha Shute of Melvin, Illinois. James and Martha had no children. They divorced sometime before 1910. In October of 1908, James moved to Fairbury and bought the medical practice of retiring physician Dr. Thatcher.

Dr. James H. Langstaff Sr. married Miss Aldine Merit in 1910 in Fairbury. In 1915, their first son, James Hartzell Langstaff II, was born in Fairbury. Dr. Langstaff was the first doctor to provide medical services in Fairbury's earliest hospitals.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I. Dr. James H. Langstaff Sr. enlisted in June of 1918 at Chicago. He was assigned to the Medical Corps at Camp Greenleaf in Georgia. Dr. James Langstaff Sr. was discharged from the military in December of 1918.

Dr. Langstaff returned to Fairbury after World War I ended. He and his wife Aldine had their second son, John Merit Langstaff, in 1919. By 1928, Fairbury's citizens realized the old hospital in the blockhouse at 313 West

Oak street was too small. As one option, Dr. Langstaff had the Chicago architect firm of Holabird & Root draw up plans for a new Fairbury hospital in June of 1928. Copies of these blueprints still exist. The Hospital Board decided instead to buy a sizable existing house on South Fifth Street from the estate of Frieda Munz Scharlach for \$6,155. This home was one of the oldest in Fairbury and was built by J. J. Taylor in 1868. Community members volunteered to convert the old house into a new hospital.

Both sons of Dr. Langstaff and Aldine's decided to follow their father's and grandfather's steps and become medical doctors. Both boys attended Fairbury Township High School. James H. Langstaff II then finished medical school at Loyola University in Chicago in 1942. While he was in medical school, he married Mary Elizabeth Durbin in 1941, just a week before Pearl Harbor. James H. Langstaff II served three and a half years in the Pacific Theater. After being discharged from the Navy in 1946, he returned to practicing medicine in Fairbury.

John M. Langstaff also attended medical school at Loyola University. He graduated in 1944 and then went directly into the U.S. Navy in 1945 as World War II was nearing the end. After the war ended, John returned to Fairbury to practice medicine with his father and brother. In 1947, he married Ruth Ford in Chatsworth. To keep straight which brother they were referring to, Fairbury citizens called them "Doctor Jim" and "Doctor John."

James H. Langstaff Sr. died in 1951. One year later, Dr. John M. Langstaff moved from Fairbury to Florida. He then attended a three-year program at the University of Miami to become a specialist in urology. "Doctor John" practiced medicine in the Miami area until he died in 1987. His brother, "Doctor Jim" continued to practice medicine in Fairbury until he died in 1990. The Langstaff Clinic building on Locust Street is undergoing a significant restoration by Shawn and Tonya Wells. You can follow the progress of this building restoration at the Facebook page titled Langstaff Building Restoration Project.

The extended Langstaff family included four medical doctors, one dentist, and one veterinarian. The Langstaff family provided valuable medical services to three generations in Central Illinois.

		Revisions	
Designed By:	Approved for		
Checked By:	Construction:		
1 <sup>st</sup> Floor Framing Plan		Scale: 1/4"=1"0"	
<b>Hospital</b> For Dr. James H. Langstaff Fairbury, ILL.		Order No. 5124	
		SHEET No. S-2	
Holabird & Root Architects 333 No. Michigan Ave., Chicago		Date: 6-23-28 Revised:	

Title block of drawing of new Fairbury hospital proposed by Dr. Langstaff in 1928.



## **CHAPTER 29**

### **Cropsey Native Was Rhodes Scholar and World-Class Historian**

The Rhodes Scholarship is the most famous international scholarship program in the world. Cropsey native Gene A. Brucker was a Rhodes Scholar and went on to become a world-renowned historian.

Gene A. Brucker's family roots go back to Germany. Gottlieb Frederick Brucker was born in Germany in 1832. Gottlieb emigrated from Germany to the Cropsey area in 1850 when he was 18 years of age. Katharine A. Glabe was also born in Germany in 1837.

In 1857, Fairbury was formed when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria east to the Indiana border. Two years after Fairbury was founded, 27-year-old Gottlieb Brucker married 22-year-old Katharine Glabe in Ford County. The first child of Gottlieb and Katharine Brucker was Adam Brucker.

Adam Brucker married Paulena Stahl in 1881. Adam and Paulena Brucker had a large family of nine children. One of their children was Walter Charles Brucker, who was born in 1889 in Cropsey. Walter Brucker married Alberta E. Koehler in 1921.

Walter Brucker farmed 240 acres in Cropsey. Walter and Alberta Brucker had one daughter and two sons. One of their sons, Gene A. Brucker, was born in 1928. On his father's farm, Gene learned a good work ethic at an early age. Gene got up each morning at six AM and helped his father milk the cows. They raised corn, oats, soybeans, milk cows, pigs, and chickens on their farm.

In a 2002 oral interview recorded at the University of California at Berkeley, Gene Brucker recounted that his father was very skilled mechanically and biologically. His father wanted to become a doctor or a surgeon, but he had no schooling, and in those days, boys were expected to work and stay on the family farm. Gene Brucker's father discovered that

his son had no aptitude for farming. Gene had no mechanical skills and was not good at working with machinery. Walter Brucker realized that his son Gene needed to go to college and learn another way to make a living besides being a farmer.

Gene Brucker attended the nearby country school in Cropsey through the eighth grade. Gene read all 50 books in his country school library. Gene then attended Cropsey High School, which was a mile and a half from his farm. The high school had 40 students and four teachers.

After completing Cropsey High School, Gene Brucker entered the University of Illinois in September of 1941, three months before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in December. After Pearl Harbor, Gene enlisted in the U.S. Army but was not called up for duty until the Spring of 1943.

During his freshman year at the University of Illinois, Gene took some history courses taught by Harvard Ph.D. Raymond Stearns. Gene Brucker and Professor Stearns eventually became close friends.

When Gene was called up for duty, the military sent him to Alabama for training. Gene Brucker was then sent to France after being liberated and assigned to an army depot. Gene never saw any active battles during his time in Europe.

After World War II ended, Gene resumed his studies at the University of Illinois. By taking night classes and summer classes, he finished his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1947. Because of the influence of Professor Stearns, Gene selected history as his major for his degree. Gene then decided to continue at the University of Illinois and eventually earn his Master's degree and Ph.D. degree. Gene Brucker worked with Professor Stearns on his Master's Thesis. Gene finished his Master's degree in history in the Spring of 1948.

In 1947, while Gene was completing his Master's degree, his friend Professor Stearns suggested he apply to become a Rhodes Scholar. Professor Stearns believed that Gene had a good chance of winning the scholarship. Gene had not heard of the Rhodes Scholarship program and had to investigate and learn what it was. He found that the Rhodes

Scholarship is one of the most prestigious scholarships in the world. Winners of the scholarship study for two years at the University of Oxford in England. Gene Brucker successfully earned the Rhodes Scholarship after undergoing many rounds of oral interview competitions with other students.

While studying at Oxford, Gene Brucker met many interesting students and professors. He found himself attracted to the field of Renaissance Italian history. Gene Brucker met and married Patricia Margaret Chantrill while he was a student at Oxford. They soon had a son, Mark Brucker, while living in England.

As he was nearing the completion of his two years of study at Oxford, Gene Brucker realized he needed to earn a Ph.D. to get a job at an American college. His mentor, Professor Stearns, happened to be on a sabbatical in London. Professor Stearns advised Gene to earn his Ph.D. at Princeton because they had the best people in Renaissance Italian history. Gene Brucker took his mentor's advice and entered the Ph.D. program at Princeton.

After finishing his Ph.D. in history at Princeton in 1954, Professor Gene Brucker then spent the rest of his life working at the University of California at Berkeley. Professor Brucker taught at Berkeley until he retired in 1991. He received several academic awards, including the Rhodes Scholarship, Fulbright Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, and the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. In 1979, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. After he retired, Berkeley designated Gene a Professor of History Emeritus at the university.

Professor Brucker was a specialist in early modern European history. He published more than 30 articles and essays and wrote 11 books, including *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*, and *The Civic World of Renaissance Florence*.

Professor Brucker died in 2017 at the age of 92. A colleague wrote that Brucker “was much more than a scholar — he was a citizen of the university.” His daughter, Wendy, said her father “was a very quiet, very humble man, considering his very distinguished accomplishments.” She

added that he was unerringly polite and would go above and beyond to help students in their professional careers.

The small town of Cropsey can be very proud of its native son Gene Brucker who grew up on a small farm, attended country school and went on to become a world-class historian.



Gene Brucker circa 1990

## **CHAPTER 30**

### **Fairbury Bottling Company a Family Affair**

Many old glass bottles are still found today in the Fairbury area. The largest source of these old bottles was the Fairbury Bottling Company.

The history of the Fairbury Bottling Company began with the birth of William Thompson Clemens in 1818 in Pennsylvania. Mary Jane McClure was also born in Pennsylvania. William and Mary Jane married in 1841 in Marshall County and had two sons. Their oldest son, William Chalmers Clemens, was born in 1844. Their younger son, James Thompson Clemens, was born in 1849.

Elder son William C. Clemens married Rhoda Emma St John. Their children were Mary E., John F. (died in infancy), Earl Thompson, and Orville C. Clemens. William farmed in the Fairbury and Pontiac areas. In the 1880s, William became interested in the bottling industry.

Younger son James T. Clemens married Matilda St. John in 1875 in Chenoa, Illinois. Rhoda E. St. John was a sister to Matilda St. John. James T. and Matilda Clemens had two children. Son Claude C. was born in 1879, and daughter Ida Carswell was born in 1884.

In March of 1881, Jacob Hollenback moved from Woodford County to Fairbury. At the same time, J. T. Clemens moved from Pontiac to Fairbury. They announced that within one month, they would begin bottling soda and mineral water in Fairbury. In June of 1881, their pop wagon capsized in the ditch by the Depot, and they wrecked thirteen bottles of pop.

In November of 1881, the two men bought the Church property in the northeast part of Fairbury. They erected a building to use as a pop factory. During the winter months, they made Bowker's birch beer, ginger ale, and champaign cider.

In 1885, J. T. Clemens built a new 16 by 24-foot brick soda water factory. Just a few weeks after Clemens opened his bottling works, he received a

big order of 36 cases of ginger ale from a nearby town. The business did so well that just six months after he started his operation, Clemens had to make a building addition.

In 1886, the business continued to grow for Clemens. J. T. Clemens was known as "Tom" to his Fairbury friends. Tom Clemens had to get up before sunrise to keep up with his orders. The Blade reported that Clemens manufactured some of the finest summer drinks in the State of Illinois.

In September of 1890, J. T. Clemens unexpectedly died at the age of only 40 years old. He had a massive funeral because he was very active in many Fairbury social groups and was on the city council. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery. Probate records indicate that his gravestone had a cost of \$1,500 in 1890 or \$43,200 in today's dollars.

After the death of J. T. Clemens, his bottling business needed to be sold. The son of J. T. Clemens was only 11 years of age and was too young to take over the company. J. T. Clemens had an aunt named Margaret McCune that had married Jacob Hollenback. The son of Margaret and Jacob Hollenback, Charles Culbertson Hollenback, was interested in taking over the soda factory.

Charles C. Hollenback was born in Washburn, Illinois. At the time of the death of J. T. Clemens in 1890, C. C. Hollenback was 18 years old. The sister of C. C. Hollenback was Miss Belle Hollenback. Frank Combes married Belle, so Frank Combes and C. C. Hollenback were brother-in-laws. The two men bought the bottling works from the estate of J. T. Clemens and took over its operation. Hollenback and Combes operated the bottling works from 1890 until 1910.

In March of 1904, the Blade reported that C. C. Hollenback had purchased an exceptional team of heavy horses. The horses would pull the delivery wagon that summer for the Fairbury Bottling Works. A very historic picture still survives, which shows the two owners and their team of horses ready to start making deliveries of their products.

While Hollenback and Combes owned the Fairbury Bottling Works, a postcard was made showing the two proprietors bottling soda. This iconic

postcard was reprinted in the 1976 Daily Leader. Copies of this postcard still exist today.

By 1910, Earl Thompson Clemens, the nephew of founder J. T. Clemens, was 35 years old. The Fairbury Bottling Works was sold to E. T. Clemens (1875-1934) in March of 1910. E. T. Clemens was married to Myrtle May Henderson (1880-1960), and they had two children. Their children were Edna E. Clemens and Harry H. Clemens.

After selling the Fairbury Bottling Works, C. C. Hollenback eventually moved to California. He died in California in 1937. Frank Combes remained in Fairbury for the rest of his life. Frank died in 1929 and is buried in Graceland Cemetery.

After E. T. Clemens bought the business, the State of Illinois instituted annual quality checks of all bottlers. In 1913, the Illinois Food Commissioner found that E. T. Clemens passed the quality test and performed contract bottling for the Zirkle Brothers of Chenoa.

In 1915 E. T. Clemens purchased a Ford car, which was converted into a truck to deliver his products. In 1917, the Fairbury Bottling Works instituted a five-cent deposit on all soda bottles to reduce the number of lost bottles.

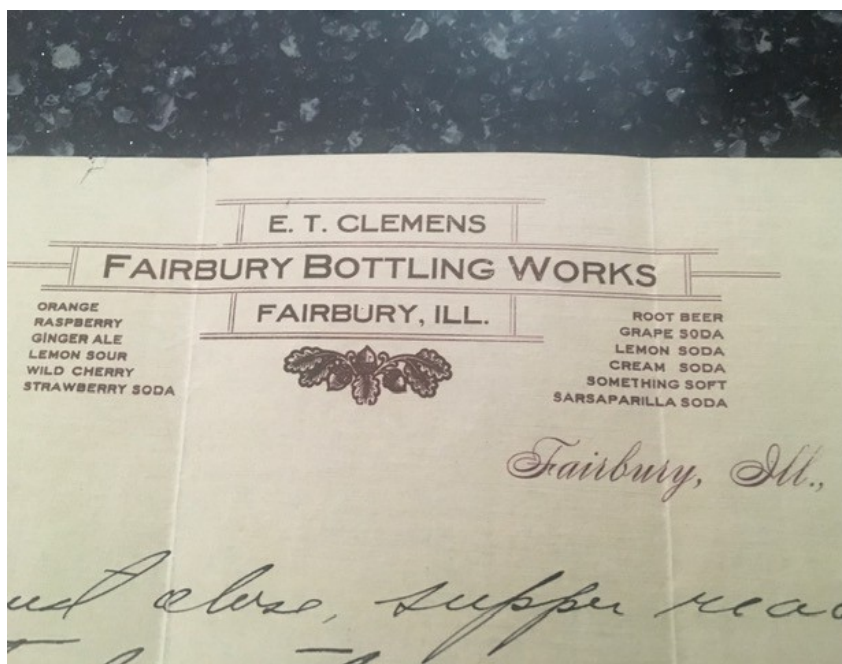
E. T. Clemens died in 1934 at the age of 59. He was buried in Graceland Cemetery. His son, Harry Henderson Clemens, at age 35, took over the bottling company. In 1936, Harry Clemens almost lost an eye. Harry did not use the safety guard around a bottle when it was being filled. The bottle exploded, and a piece of glass hit his eyeball. The Fairbury Bottling Works was closed sometime between 1943 and 1946. Harry Clemens died at age 62 in 1964 and was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

The Fairbury Bottling Works used many bottles because they were in business for over 50 years. Many of these bottles are still being found in the Fairbury area. They have become collector's items and are a reminder of Fairbury's family-owned bottling operation.



Fairbury Bottling Works Circa 1904





Fairbury Bottling Works Company Letterhead



Iconic Post Card of Fairbury Bottling Works

# POST CARD

CORRESPONDENCE



NAME AND ADDRESS

The Fairbury Bottling Works came into existence by public demand to supply the town's seven saloons which had sprung up by 1880, greater liquor supplies were needed. Fairbury saloons swarmed with tough railroad men and coal miners from six in the morning until far into the night. The helplessly inebriated were thrown out into the alley, to be sorted over by their friends and taken home in wheelbarrows. Fist-a-cuffs and gun fights raged nightly keeping the doctors busy until the early morning hours.

Fairbury's solid citizens appealed to the city fathers to put a halt to this moral decay. A temperance society was formed and after a long struggle they forced the passage of a series of ordinances that at least modified the evils.

It was noted shortly thereafter a local druggist hastened to relieve the drought by under the counter sales of cough medicine.

with Beard  
Frank Combes  
Charlie Holenb  
ck

PEOPLE MAKE IT HAPPEN



## **CHAPTER 31**

### **Lodemia History**

One of the Fairbury area ghost towns is Lodemia. In the 1960s, it had a grain elevator and a large township hall used for community group meetings. By the 1980s, nothing was left of this little community northwest of Fairbury.

The story of Lodemia started with John E. Bodley, Sr. In 1852, he purchased 330 acres of farmland from the federal government for \$2.50 an acre. Two years later, John Sr. moved his family from Fountain County, Indiana, to his farm about five miles northwest of Fairbury. He spent his first few years breaking the virgin prairie and building his farmhouse and buildings.

In 1872, the Chicago & Paducah Railroad laid its tracks from Streator to Strawn. The railroad portion that went from Pontiac to Fairbury went directly through part of John Bodley's farm. Local residents quickly erected a grain elevator. The new train stop was called Lodemia Station. The railroad was eventually bought out by the Wabash Railroad.

John Bodley Sr. was a devout Methodist. He was the primary financial contributor for building the Centennial Methodist Episcopal Church at Lodemia in 1876. The church building had a cost of \$2,800, which would be equivalent to \$68,100 in today's dollars. Church members built a parsonage next to the church. The church was located at the northeast corner of the T-intersection at 1250 N 1900 E Road.

One year after the Centennial Church was established, the Lodemia Post Office was created. Dr. C. B. Ostrander was the first Postmaster.

By 1878, the farmland that John Bodley Sr. purchased from the federal government for \$2.50 per acre had increased in value to \$50 an acre. His 330 acres were appraised at \$16,500. This appraisal is equivalent to \$443,000 in today's dollars.

Lodemia never really took off as a thriving town. It had a grain elevator, church, country school, town hall, and four or five houses. In 1891, the U.S. Post Office in Lodemia was discontinued. Local farmers then received their mail from either Fairbury or Pontiac rural routes.

By 1898, the Lodemia church was 22 years old. Church members remodeled the church, including fresh paint and wallpaper. In February of 1905, the son of John Bodley Sr. died. His son's funeral was held in the Centennial Church. Because it was a cold winter day, the stove was stoked well to heat the church.

After the funeral was over, the funeral party began transporting the body of John Bodley Jr. to the family plot in the Pontiac Southside Cemetery. Shortly after the funeral procession left Lodemia and headed to Pontiac, the church caught fire and burned to the ground. Because everyone in Lodemia had gone to Pontiac, nobody was left to fight the fire. The cause of the fire was suspected to be the heating stove or chimney.

Six months later, a new church was built at Lodemia. The new church was dedicated by Rev. Jesse S. Dancey, who was the pastor of the Methodist Church in Leroy. Rev. Dancey had been converted into a church member in the Lodemia church that burned down.

In 1907, 23 students were attending the Lodemia country school. These students included many grandchildren of John Bodley Sr. Some of these descendants were Frances Ann Bodley, Avis Bodley, and Paul Bodley.

In 1909, another grand-daughter of John Bodley Sr. decided to attend St. Mary's school in Pontiac instead of the country school next door. At the age of only five, Dorothy Bodley walked to the Wabash train station at Lodemia and rode the train to school at Pontiac every day. Dorothy later married Bernard Tollensdorf, and they ran the Fairbury Paint Store for many years.

After farm mechanization started in the early 1900s, the numbers of farmers and farm children steadily declined. Large families were no longer needed to farm the land. In 1925, the Lodemia church and furniture were sold at public auction.

Lodemia had a sizable wood-frame building known as Lodemia Town Hall or Lodemia Hall. This building was the polling place for Avoca township. The building was also used for community meetings, including picnics and special guest speakers.

In the 1940s, brothers Charles and John Maley attended Lodemia country school. They were great-grandsons of John Bodley Sr. Each of these brothers carved their names into their wooden school desks. Their wooden school desks still survive and are owned by Maley family descendants.

With the steady decline in the number of farm children, all country schools closed around 1949 in Livingston County. After the Lodemia country school closed, the students had to attend Fairbury schools. In 1952, the Lodemia country school was sold at a public auction.

During the 1960s, Lodemia Hall was a busy community meeting center. The ABC (Avoca Betterment Club) held their meetings at Lodemia Hall. The goal of this group was to improve their farmsteads and help out neighbors. Each year a drawing was held. The winner of the drawing received free labor from all the members for one day to help improve their farm. One year, Jim Goold won the contest. Instead of working on a project at his farm, he requested his neighbors spend the day improving Lodemia Hall.

Keith Coleman was the manager of the Lodemia elevator in the 1960s. He provided a small office room with cold bottled pop, peanuts from a vending machine, and candy bars. Local farm kids loved to go with their father to the Lodemia elevator on a hot summer day. The farm kids got an ice-cold bottle of pop, along with peanuts or a candy bar. Keith later became the manager of the elevator in Fairbury.

Lodemia area farm kids also liked to spend time on the Wabash railroad tracks. Wild strawberries grew along the route, and they were a delightful treat. Pennies would be placed on top of the steel railroad tracks for the Wabash trains to flatten as they rumbled down the rails every day.

In July of 1971, the Lodemia elevator burned down. Within a couple more years, the railroad tracks were removed, and Lodemia Hall burned down.

Today, there are no remnants of Lodemia. All that remains are old photographs and the fond memories held by former Lodemia residents.



Lodemia Grain Elevator Circa 1960





Back row - Emma Fether - Marie Storch - Horace Rodley - Clinton Stewart - Clarence Stewart - Jennie Kiefer - Carl Bani  
 2nd row - James Rodley - Hope Meehan - John Stewart - Frances Enders - Lee Rice - Laura Tucker - Ethel Fether - Hazel Banks - Alice  
 3rd row - Stewart - Granville Rodley - Ruth Storch - Charles Lassner - Teacher - Marie Kiefer - Paul Rodley - Elvira  
 Lodemia School - about 1907 Arnold Fee

## Lodemia Country School class circa 1907



## **CHAPTER 32**

### **President Reagan Courted Cropsey School Teacher**

In the early 1930s, about 100 people were attending Cropsey High School. None of these students realized their English teacher's boyfriend who visited her class would someday become the President of the United States.

Future Cropsey school teacher Margaret Cleaver was born in 1911 to the Reverend Benjamin Hill Cleaver and Mabel Lewis. Margaret had two sisters, Elizabeth and Helen Cleaver. As is the case with most ministers, the family moved every few years to a new city. When Margaret Cleaver reached high school age, her family was living in Dixon, Illinois.

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born in 1911 in Tampico, Illinois. He was the son of Jack Reagan and Nelle Clyde Wilson. The Reagan family also moved to several different towns during Ronald Reagan's childhood. When Ronald Reagan reached high school age, his family was living in Dixon, Illinois.

In the Fall of 1924, both Margaret Cleaver and Ronald Reagan started attending Dixon High School. Reagan developed interests in acting, sports, and storytelling. During the summer months, Reagan worked as a lifeguard at the Rock River in Lowell Park. During his time as a lifeguard, Reagan performed 77 rescues.

Margaret Cleaver was considered one of the Dixon High School's most intelligent students. Reagan became smitten with Margaret during their sophomore year at Dixon High School. Reagan had to battle the high school quarterback to win Margaret's attention. Reagan and Margaret were both in the Drama Club and appeared in several plays together. Reagan was elected the high school student body president, and Margaret was elected President of their senior class.

After finishing high school, Margaret decided to follow her two older sisters to attend Eureka College, 100 miles south of Dixon. Once Margaret chose Eureka College, Ronald Reagan immediately decided to follow his girlfriend and also attend Eureka College.

In the Fall of 1928, both Reagan and Margaret started attending Eureka College. Both of them joined the Eureka Drama Club and appeared in many college plays together. He became a member of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity. Reagan was an indifferent college student. He majored in economics and sociology and graduated with a C grade.

Reagan developed a reputation as a "jack of all trades," excelling in campus politics, sports, and theater. He was a member of the football team and captain of the swim team. Reagan was elected student body president and participated in student protests against the college president.

By their sophomore year at Eureka, Reagan gave his fraternity pin to Margaret. Soon after, he gave her an engagement ring. Even though Reagan did not have much money, he splurged and bought 5 pounds of chocolate for Margaret's sorority sisters to celebrate their engagement. Margaret and Reagan agreed to get married as soon as they could afford it.

By the time Reagan and Margaret graduated from Eureka College in the Spring of 1932, the Great Depression was in full swing. Many Eureka professors got no pay for several years. Because of the hard times, the Eureka College Class of 1932 had no college yearbook.

After graduation, Margaret and Reagan did not have enough money to get married. Reagan took several different sports radio announcing jobs in Iowa. He moved to the WHO radio in Des Moines as an announcer for Chicago Cubs baseball games.

Margaret Cleaver accepted a teaching position at the Cropsey High School. She started teaching English in the Fall of 1932. Some of her fellow teachers included John Land, Margaret Meeker, Ruth Starr, and Charles Taylor. Margaret was the Sophomore Class Advisor in 1932. The officers of that class were President Loraine Weatherford, Vice-President Betty Jean Meeker, and Secretary-Treasurer was Marjorie Woods.

Margaret liked to go to the farm of student Josephine Brucker and ride their horses. Josephine later married Wendell Cooperider. Maurice Cox graduated from Cropsey high school in 1936 and was a student while Margaret was teaching. Maurice was later the Fairbury Chief of Police and Mayor.

One day, Ronald Reagan motored to the Cropsey High School to visit his fiancée Margaret Cleaver. Lawrence Brucker was a student in Margaret's class. After Ronald Reagan became famous, Mr. Brucker often recounted the story about meeting the future President when his teacher brought the man she was dating to their class.

In the summer of 1934, 23-year-old Margaret and her older sister Helen decided to visit Europe. While in France, Margaret met a handsome young man named James Waddell Gordon Jr. from Virginia. Mr. Gordon was the same age as Margaret and was stationed in Europe as a U.S. Government foreign service officer. Mr. Gordon and Margaret began a romantic relationship.

Margaret returned to her Cropsey teaching job after her European trip. She then called off her engagement to Reagan. Margaret mailed Reagan's fraternity pin and engagement ring to him in Des Moines. Margaret included a letter which explained she had gone to Europe with her sister and met and fell in love with foreign service officer James Gordon. Later in life, Margaret recounted that Reagan was absorbed with Hollywood and the movies. Margaret stated that she had no interest in moving out West, and she did not want to raise her family in Hollywood.

Margaret finished the 1934-1935 school year teaching in Cropsey. In June of 1935, she married Mr. Gordon in Eureka, Illinois. Her father officiated at her wedding. Cropsey citizens who attended the wedding were Mrs. Goldie Meeker, Miss Margaret Meeker, Mr. and Mrs. Willis War, Mr. and Mrs. John Land, Mr. and Mrs. Adam Metzger, and Mrs. Charles Cumpston.

Margaret and James Gordon eventually settled in Richmond, Virginia. They had five children and 11 grandchildren. Margaret Gordon passed away in 2001. Ronald Reagan became a movie actor, the Governor of California, and then the United States President. Reagan died in 2004.

In 2002, the Cropsey High School building where Margaret taught was torn down. For about 100 Cropsey High School students, they had the unique opportunity of attending school with the fiancée of Ronald Reagan. The students in Margaret's class got the unique opportunity to meet the future President of the United States.



Margaret Cleaver. She taught school at Cropsey and was the fiancée of future President Ronald Reagan

## **CHAPTER 33**

### **History of Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery**

The history of Graceland Cemetery is intertwined with the story of the founding of Fairbury. This story began with John A. Atkins (1808-1881), a pioneering farmer in Illinois. John Atkins was born in Waterbury, Vermont, and married Anna Alden in 1832. John and Anna moved to Will County, Illinois, in 1834. In 1847, Anna Atkins died at age 39. Two years after Anna's death, John Atkins married his second wife, Lucy M. Gillet, from Canada.

Graceland Cemetery is located in the northwest corner of Section 11 in Indian Grove Township. In 1853, John Atkins bought 40 acres in the northwest corner of Section 11. In 1854, he purchased another 40 acres in this same northwest corner. Atkins paid \$3.50 per acre for this farmland.

The Fairbury cemetery was surveyed by Isaac R. Clarke, August 30, 1855. The small cemetery was originally one-fourth of the northwest corner of Section 11. By 1878, the cemetery had been expanded and included trees and shrubs. The first burial in this cemetery was a Mrs. Hughes, wife of David Hughes, in 1855 shortly after the cemetery was surveyed.

In 1851, a new law was passed in Illinois, which allowed the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad to lay new tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. This announcement caused Fairbury area farmers to scramble to buy land, then persuade the railroad to put their new line through their farm. The winning farmer could make a considerable profit by converting raw farmland to city residential lots.

The area farmers in competition for the new railroad to be routed through their farms were John Atkins, Salmon Cone, David Magie, and Caleb Patton. Mr. Patton bought some land from Dr. J. Leland Miller a short time before the railroad came through. Caleb Patton won the competition because he offered the railroad half of the new city lots if the railroad would choose his farm. Octave Chanute, in charge of the railroad project, accepted Mr. Patton's offer.

Although John Atkins lost in the contest to have the new railroad ran through his farm, one could argue he was also a winner. During this era, his daughter, Julia Atkins, met and married Dr. J. Leland Miller. Dr. Miller was a physician, farmer, and land speculator. After Fairbury was formed, the newlyweds moved back east to Dr. Miller's birthplace of Sheffield, Massachusetts. They donated \$40,000 to Williams College in 1889. This donation would be equivalent to \$1.24 million in today's dollars.

Another of the early burials in the Fairbury Cemetery was for twin sisters Minnie E. and Rachael C. Ives in 1855. They were the daughters of Titus Ives and Margaret Ann Chambers. Both Titus and Margaret were born in Indiana, and they married in 1851. On January 19, 1853, they had twin girls named Minnie E. and Rachael C. Ives. Just two months shy of their third birthdays, both twins died on November 23, 1855.

In 1857, the year Fairbury was founded, Mr. Atkins moved his family to the Fairbury area. Two years later, in 1859, Lucy, the second wife of Mr. Atkins, died. She was buried in the Fairbury Cemetery on the farmland of John Atkins.

In 1865, Fairbury was expanded with the Atkins Addition in the southeast part of town. This new addition was bounded on the north by Maple Street, on the south by Oak Street or Route 24, on the west by Seventh Street, and the east by Tenth Street. It also included the southeast corner of the Route 24 and Seventh Street intersection, which is now Graceland Cemetery.

The earliest dated map, which shows the Fairbury Cemetery is in the 1871 Atlas of Livingston County. A map shows a tiny cemetery on what is now the very south end of Graceland Cemetery.

By 1899, the tiny cemetery along south Seventh Street was becoming full. In August of 1899, the Fairbury Blade recounted that Michael Morris received the plat for his new addition to the Fairbury Cemetery. The Blade also noted that plots would soon be available for sale.

Mr. Morris was born in County Roscommon, Ireland, in 1842. In 1861, he came to Illinois and settled on a farm south of Fairbury. Michael enlisted in Company E of the 129th Infantry and served for three years in the Civil War. After the war ended, Mr. Morris returned to farming south of



Fairbury. Michael Morris died in 1904 and was buried in the Fairbury Cemetery.

At some point, the Fairbury Cemetery came under the management of the City of Fairbury. In 1919, the Graceland Cemetery Association was created. This new association purchased the remaining unsold lots from Nancy James Morris, the widow of Michael Morris, for \$5,000. Mrs. Morris also gave \$500 for an endowment fund for the cemetery.

The first trustees for the Graceland Cemetery Association were Miss Anna Weber, A. B. Claudon, Jr., Dr. J. R. Rayburn, Frank Duell, Frank Fitzgerald, Herbert Powell, Mrs. Herbert Powell, Mrs. M. A. Anderson, Mrs. J. W. McDowell, and J. N. Bach.

Before the formation of the Graceland Cemetery Association in 1919, newspaper obituaries referred to burials in the Fairbury Cemetery. After the Graceland Cemetery Association took over the cemetery from the City of Fairbury, most obituaries began to refer to the cemetery as Graceland Cemetery.

As the years went by, Graceland Cemetery kept expanding until it occupied most of the northwest corner of Section 11 in Indian Grove Township. The three sections in the main cemetery are referred to as the Old-Old Cemetery, the Old Cemetery, and the Morris Addition. When the main cemetery started to reach its burial capacity, the South Graceland Cemetery was added one mile south of Fairbury on Seventh Street. South Graceland Cemetery is divided into Sections A, B, and C.

The history of Graceland Cemetery pre-dates the founding of Fairbury by a couple of years. This history is linked to one of the founders of early Fairbury, John Atkins. He was the first to own the farmland where the cemetery is now located, and he expanded Fairbury with his Atkins Addition.



Entrance sign for Graceland Cemetery

## **CHAPTER 34**

### **Tales from Graceland Cemetery**

All cemeteries are full of unique stories about the people buried there. Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery has its share of exciting tales as well. The first curious tale is that of William T. Stackpole. He was one of early Fairbury's most interesting citizens. He lived from 1827 until 1894. During his life, William was a gold prospector, pioneer, farmer, merchant, grain speculator, oil field worker, real estate salesperson, inventor, writer, publisher, and visionary. His house still stands on the northeast corner of West Maple and North Webster streets at the southeast corner of Marsh Park.

After losing three fortunes, when William T. Stackpole died in 1894, he was penniless and buried in an unmarked grave at Graceland Cemetery. His surviving wife and daughter continued to live in their home by Marsh Park. In those days, there was no Social Security system, so his wife and daughter were destitute. Nearby neighbors tried to give them food. The wife Jennie died in 1908, and then his daughter Anna died in 1940. William, his wife Jennie, and daughter Anna are all buried in unmarked graves at Graceland.

Fairbury was shocked in 1899 when the very popular Fred Baird was murdered. He was the modern equivalent of both Fire Chief and Police Chief. Fred was first buried in the small Cooper Cemetery about seven miles south and two miles west of Fairbury. The whole town of Fairbury took up a collection to buy him a beautiful gravestone and to bury him at Graceland. The community collection drive was successful, and today Fred is buried with a beautiful tombstone at Graceland, east of the Mausoleum.

Thomas A. Beach was the wealthiest man to ever live in Fairbury. He was a banker and businessman. In 1872, Beach built a new house on East Hickory Street. The house is an excellent example of the Italianate architecture style. In 1983, this home was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Fairbury residents commonly call it the "Lion House" because of the two concrete lions in the front yard. Mr. Beach also had a

private family mausoleum constructed at Graceland Cemetery. At the time of his death in 1911, his net worth is estimated to be more than \$50 million in today's dollars.

Fairbury made the national newspapers in January of 1917. Two citizens of Fairbury, Stephen Young, and Sophia Lancaster died in the same week, and their relatives claimed they were each 117 years old. Both of these citizens were African Americans, and both were former slaves. Both of these individuals were buried in the oldest part of Graceland Cemetery along south Seventh Street.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, many soldiers from other states moved to Fairbury. The vast majority of these soldiers served in the Union forces. Two former Confederate soldiers also moved to Fairbury, but they kept their military service relatively quiet.

One of these former Confederate soldiers was Madison Kershner. He was born in West Virginia and served in the Confederate Army. In 1914, Mr. Kershner, his wife, and nine children moved to a home at 606 East Elm Street in Fairbury. They attended the Fairbury Baptist Church. Mr. Kershner was well-liked in the community. In 1916, at the age of 74, Mr. Kershner died and was buried in Graceland Cemetery.

A very unusual incident occurred in October of 1942 in Fairbury. A 76-year-old man was pushing a cart along Route 24 in Fairbury. Someone in an auto struck him and threw him 55 feet from the point of impact. The man was still alive when the first motorist stopped to investigate. A World War II sugar rationing card, found in the man's pocket, indicated he was Rhinehart Lyons from Plainfield, Illinois. The man matched the height and weight shown on the rationing card. Just before the man died, he said his name was Hanson, and he was from Paxton.

Authorities called to Plainfield officials and inquired about Mr. Lyons. The Plainfield authorities said he periodically visited Plainfield to sharpen items, but he had no home there. Fairbury citizens contacted Paxton officials, and they reported Mr. Lyons did not live there either. When officials examined the man's two-wheel cart, they found a one-person tent, bedding, and some food. Authorities concluded the man had no permanent home, and he slept along the road.

After searching for one week, authorities gave up on finding a next of kin. Coroner Essington ordered the body to be interred. Rhinehart Lyons was buried in an unmarked grave in Graceland Cemetery.

The most nationally famous person buried at Graceland Cemetery is the world-class motorcycle racer Carl Goudy. Carl and his brother William grew up in Fairbury. Both boys took an interest in motorcycles when they began to appear in the early 1910s. Very quickly, both brothers became motorcycle racers at tracks all over the United States. Carl Goudy reached his peak in late 1915 when he won the prestigious Chicago motorcycle race. After the Chicago race was over, Carl loaned his high-speed motorcycle to his brother William Goudy.

William Goudy took the fast bike to a California race track. William and another professional racer started doing practice laps on the track. A third professional driver entered the field and passed the other two drivers. After he passed William and the other driver, he accidentally dumped his motorcycle on the track. To avoid hitting the downed bike and driver, William swerved in one direction, and the other driver swerved in the other direction. Unfortunately, both William and the other driver were instantly killed when they struck objects on the track's border. Carl Goudy buried his brother William Goudy in a nearby California Cemetery.

After William's death in January of 1916, Carl's Fairbury grade-school sweetheart, Hazel Dominy Bane, agreed to marry Carl if he first gave up motorcycle racing. Carl gave up motorcycle racing and married Hazel in July of 1916. Carl went on to have a very successful business career in New York. Both Carl and his wife Hazel are interred in the Fairbury Mausoleum.

## FORMER MOTORCYCLE CHAMPION AND HIS SCHOOLMATE BRIDE

Carl F. Goudy,  
Once World's  
Champion  
Motorcycle  
Racer,  
and His Wife.





## **CHAPTER 35**

### **The Hard Road in Fairbury**

#### **Fairbury's Rich History of Discovering Native American Artifacts**

The story of how we got paved roads began when Illinois first became a state in 1818. From its inception until the 1920s, roads were primarily dirt roads. In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its new tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. Fairbury area farmers used horse-drawn wagons on these dirt roads to transport their crops to the nearest grain elevator on a railroad. People traveled primarily by railroad to far-off destinations.

From 1819 until 1905, each county elected Road Commissioners who were responsible for appointing land-holding road supervisors in each township. These road supervisors—most of whom were local farmers—were then responsible for all road construction and upkeep within his precinct or district paid for by local funds and built by local hands. This highly decentralized system kept townships and counties free from state oversight and interference in local affairs. This system worked fine for the horse and buggy era.

In 1908, Henry Ford introduced his Model T "horseless-carriage" automobile. This low-cost car allowed the ordinary man to afford an automobile. The general public began purchasing cars at a phenomenal rate. Motor vehicle registration in Illinois jumped from 94,650 vehicles in 1913 to 389,620 by 1918.

Many of these early automobile owners had to put their new car away for the winter months because the dirt roads were impassible. As the number of car owners increased, political pressure began to build to improve the roads at the state level. The old county Road Commissioner model was not equipped to deal with the public's demand for the better highways needed by automobiles.

As governments often do, the Illinois State Legislature first established the Illinois State Highway Commission to study the issue of poor roads in 1905. Between 1906 and 1912, the commission held 783 public meetings, including at least one meeting in each of the state's 102 counties. The commission found that only 7,860 miles, or roughly eight percent, of the state's 94,000 miles of roads were surfaced. Illinois was trailing the states of Indiana and Massachusetts concerning road paving. Indiana had 38% of their rural roads paved, and Massachusetts had over 50 percent of their highways paved.

A group of concerned citizens and business groups joined together and formed the Good Roads Movement. Only through their continuous persuasion did the State of Illinois take action to improve the roads. The State of Illinois set up experimental stretches of the roadway using various concrete types to determine what roadway material was the best. Concrete roads were referred to as "hard roads" in that era.

In 1917, Frank Lowden became the first Illinois governor to ride to his inauguration in an automobile. Governor Lowden used his inaugural speech to call for a comprehensive system of improved roads throughout the state. Understanding that what stood in the way of this goal was not focus but finance, he called for a statewide referendum to approve a massive bond issue of \$60 million to build 4,800 miles of hard road. Illinois voters approved this bond issuance in November of 1918. This amount would be equivalent to \$1.04 billion in today's dollars. The bond was paid back using auto registration fees, not an increase in income or property taxes.

The new roads were phased in between 1919 and 1923 throughout the state. What is now Route 24 was designated as the Cornbelt Trail on the first state highway map issued in 1917. The Cornbelt Trail would not be paved with concrete until 1923. It was designated as Route 8 initially. Later, the name was changed to the current name of Route 24.

Fairbury citizens were tremendously excited about the progress of the hard roads in Central Illinois. The Blade newspaper even set up a unique weekly column called "Hard Road Gossip." Each week, the newspaper reported what nearby communities were receiving their new hard roads. Because the Cornbelt Trail ran through many different counties, roadwork



was done on a county level. Motorists wanting to travel from Fairbury to Peoria had to wait until the Fall of 1924, when all the different segments were completed, before they had good roads during the whole trip.

The contracts for the new hard road to the east and west of Fairbury were issued in the summer of 1923. During that summer, contractors installed new hard roads at the rate of 50 miles per week in the state. These road crews employed 9,100 men, 2,000 teams of horses, 116 concrete mixers, and numerous fleets of trucks and other motor equipment. The new hard road standard width was 18 feet, and the concrete was a minimum of seven inches thick. Towns could elect to expand the width to 30 feet at their own expense.

The December 1923 Blade reported the new hard road was finally open between Fairbury and Forrest. The last section of the new hard road was Oak Street in Fairbury. This section was last because the city elected to pay for expanding the road from 18 to 30 feet. Crews completed this last piece in May of 1924.

Fortunately, Fairbury received its hard road funding before the \$60 million bond fund was exhausted in early 1924. In 1924, Governor Len Small pushed for another bond issuance of \$100 million to finish paving the last 5,100 miles of road in the state. Voters approved this second bond referendum. Illinois paved all of its major roadways in the ten years between 1918 and 1928. Illinois became a leader among the states for having the most miles of paved roads.

For at least three generations after the hard road was completed in Fairbury in 1923, citizens referred to this as the "hard road" instead of Route 8, Oak Street, or later Route 24. Parents for several generations instructed their children not to walk or ride their bicycles across the "hard road" because it was too dangerous with the high traffic on that road. Current generations accept a concrete roadway as standard procedure and don't appreciate what a significant improvement the concrete highway was over the distant past's muddy dirt roads.



The introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908 started the push  
for better roads in Illinois

## **CHAPTER 36**

### **Interesting Century-Long Transition from Lumberyard to Medical Facility**

Today, the OSF Medical Group building occupies the land southwest of the intersection of First and Locust Streets. Over the last 128 years, this property has had several fascinating businesses.

The story of this property began with Jesse Stevens's birth in Sloansville, New York, in 1855. His parents were Mark Wheeler Stevens and Lucey Phelps. Jesse attended the local Sloansville schools. When Jesse was 17, his father sent him to Germany to complete his education. Jesse went to school in Germany for three years. When Jesse returned to America, he taught school for a while. Jesse then went into business with the Bradstreet's Company in St. Louis. He remained with this company for 13 years.

In 1893, Jesse Stevens married Miss Dora Purse at Ashley, Missouri. After their wedding, the couple moved to Fairbury. Jesse decided to get into the lumber yard business in Fairbury. In 1893, he built a massive lumber yard at the southwest corner of First Street and Locust Street.

In the 1890s, Von Tobel's lumber yard was situated between old City Hall and the current Post Office. This ground was sunken about three feet, similar to Sunken Park. Local citizens did not like the unsightly lumber yard in the center of the Fairbury business district. When visitors arrived by a passenger train at the depot, the first thing they saw was the unsightly old lumberyard.

Jacob Von Tobel decided to retire. In late 1899, Jacob sold his lumberyard to Jesse Stevens. Jesse tore down the buildings and moved the lumber to his new lumberyard. Local citizens were very pleased that Von Tobel's unsightly lumber yard was finally gone. Local volunteers then filled the sunken area of the lumberyard and converted it into Central Park in 1902. This park is now Veteran's Memorial Park.

Although no evidence exists today that this site was Jesse's lumberyard, two surviving documents detail his large lumberyard. The first document is the 1911 Sanborn Insurance map. Between 1885 and 1911, the Sanborn Insurance Company made five different maps of Fairbury. Jesse's lumberyard was shown in the 1911 Sanborn map. It included a coal shed, a coal chute, lumber shed, and a lime and cement building just south of the TP&W railroad tracks. Coal, lumber, and cement were delivered by train to this lumberyard.

The office for Jesse's lumberyard was just south of the railroad tracks on First Street. Three additional buildings at the lumber yard stored over 400,000 feet of boards. The 1911 Sanborn map noted the lumberyard had no watchman but did have dry fire extinguishers.

The second document, which shows Jesse's lumber yard, is an undated aerial photograph looking south over the old lumberyard. The building layout of the lumberyard exactly matches the Sanborn map drawings. The First Christian Church at the southwest corner of First and Walnut Streets is also shown in the aerial view.

Jesse and Dora Stevens had no children. In 1900, Jesse contracted typhoid fever. In that era, typhoid fever was almost a sure death sentence. It is usually caused by contaminated water. Typhoid was not treatable until 1942, when antibiotics became widely used. Remarkably, Jesse Stevens survived typhoid fever.

Bald eagles have not been widely seen in Fairbury until recent years. Back in 1913, Jesse Stevens saw an eagle one night on a fence in his lumberyard. In that era, it was also very unusual to see an eagle. As he approached the bird, it raised its wings and screamed at him. Jesse stunned the bird by hitting it with a pole. He took the stunned eagle home and measured the wingspan at six feet tip-to-tip.

Jesse Steven died in July of 1914 at the age of 58. His obituary recounted that Jesse died of apoplexy, which is a cerebral hemorrhage or stroke. Jesse was associated with the Presbyterian Church, the Masonic Lodge, the Odd Fellows, and the Modern Woodmen Lodges. He was buried in his wife's hometown of Louisiana, Missouri.

Within one month of his death, Jesse's lumberyard was sold for \$7,000 to Alexander Lumber. This amount would be equivalent to \$181,000 in today's dollars.

Samuel Albert Demler was born in Fairbury in 1881. When he was 17 years old in 1898, he went to work for Jesse Stevens at his lumberyard. When Jesse died in 1914, the new owner, Alexander Lumber, made S. A. Demler the manager. Mr. Demler was the manager for the next 27 years until he died in 1941. Mr. Demler was also the Fairbury Fire Chief for 30 years. After Mr. Demler's death, Fred Wing Sr. moved to Fairbury and replaced him as the lumberyard manager.

In October of 1942, the Alexander Lumber company experienced a fire. The Fairbury Fire Department responded and saved most of the lumber yard. Mr. Burns, representing the lumberyard, appeared at the next City Council meeting and thanked the Fire Department for their efforts.

Each year, the Blade printed a list of all the Fairbury companies paid for their services or products. The city or the surrounding townships paid the bills. These records indicate that Alexander Lumber company was in business until at least April of 1963. By 1963, the buildings at the lumberyard were over 70 years old. They had outlived their useful life.

Around that time, Howard Arnold bought the old lumberyard. He knocked down most of the old buildings but maintained an office on that site. Howard was a local contractor who resurfaced roads and provided related construction services.

In 1994, the OSF Medical Group moved into their new office on the former site of Jesse Stevens' 1893 lumber yard. Their new street address was 106 South First Street. It is an exciting story of how Jesse's state-of-the-art 1893 lumberyard evolved over 128 years to become a modern medical facility.



Aerial view of Jesse Steven's Lumberyard later purchased by  
Alexander Lumber

## **CHAPTER 37**

### **Bach Lumber Yard In Business for 72 Years**

Many Fairbury homes were built using lumber from the Bach lumber yard. The story of this lumber yard started with John Nicholas Bach's birth in 1871 at Voellerdingen in Alsace Loraine. He was the son of Nicholas Bach and Caroline Meiss. J. N. Bach came to America in 1880 and first settled in Nebraska. He then moved to Fairbury in 1890 and married Miss Lydia Von Tobel in 1897. John and Caroline had nine children.

J. N. Bach first worked for Walton Brothers. He then entered the lumber business working for Jesse Stevens at the Cornish Lumber Company. He then worked for his father-in-law, Jacob Von Tobel, at his lumber yard. Von Tobel's lumberyard was where Veterans Memorial Park is now located. Von Tobel decided to retire and sold his lumberyard to Jesse Stevens. Jesse tore down the buildings and moved the lumber to his yard at the southwest corner of First and Locust Streets south of the tracks.

In June of 1901, J. N. Bach started up his own company, and his lumberyard was at the southwest corner of Seventh and Locust Streets. In 1926, J. N. Bach improved his lumberyard. He jacked up and moved the old office further south on Seventh Street. He put up a new building with a 56 foot long front with a stucco finish. The new building had a central office, a private office, and display rooms for hardware, paint, sash, and doors.

The oldest son of J. N. Bach was Alfred Erwin Bach, born in 1898 in Fairbury. He graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1916. He then attended the University of Illinois and was drafted into U.S. Navy in WWI in October of 1918 at Urbana, Illinois. He was discharged in December of 1918 at Urbana. He married Mabel Brooks of Paxton in November of 1918. Alfred was then the manager of the Fred A. Smith Lumber Company in Buckley. He later was associated with the State of Illinois Department of Architecture at Springfield. He was also employed with the University of Illinois architectural department. He moved to Florida and died there in 1970.

Unfortunately, J. N. Bach's lumberyard burned to the ground in September of 1929. It was a massive fire, and the intense heat kept the Fairbury Fire Department from getting close to the blaze. The estimated loss was over \$50,000. J. N. Bach only had fire insurance to cover one-third of the damage. \$50,000 in 1929 would be equivalent to \$758,000 in today's dollars.

Fortunately for Fairbury, J. N. Bach decided to rebuild his lumberyard. J. N. Bach first bought the adjacent Schnetzler-Dailey Lumber Company building and yard. The purchase of an existing building got him back into business quickly. J. N. Bach then proceeded to erect new buildings and an office where the fire was.

In 1938, J. N. Bach changed his lumberyard business from a sole proprietor to a partnership with his four sons. The four sons and their ages at that time were Harry Bach, 34, Clarence Bach, 28, J. N. Bach Jr., 25, and Robert A. Bach, age 23.

The Japanese bombed the American fleet in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. This event marked the entry of the United States into World War II. Robert A. Bach entered the U.S. Army Infantry in March of 1941, nine months before the war started. He served in the European Theatre and was killed in February of 1945 at Klientorsdolf, Germany. He was a Technical Sergeant and received a Purple Heart. Robert A. Bach was only 30 years old when he was killed in WWII.

In 1962, J. N. Bach Jr. took his first trip to Canada to open the Boy Scout camp on a small lake. He and other Scout leaders swept out the cabins, repaired damaged machinery, and cleared out the brush. At summer's end, J. N. Bach Jr. would go back north and close up the camp. Ironically, J. N. Bach Jr. was never a Boy Scout, although his sons were for a short time.

J. N. Bach Sr. died in 1951 at the age of 79. His three sons continued to operate the lumberyard after his death. In 1973, the three brothers were nearing retirement. Harry Bach was 69, Clarence Bach was 63, and J. N. Bach Jr. was 60 years of age.



J. N. Bach & Sons discontinued business on its 72nd anniversary in July of 1973. The lumberyard was sold to Sam Hoffman, a former employee of Mr. Timber. Sam Hoffman operated the lumberyard until he closed it in 1984. The building was converted to rental storage spaces and still stands today.

In 1995, J. N. Bach Jr. was honored by the Canadian government when they named a small bay after him. Bach Bay is about three square miles in size and is nestled off Clearwater Lake in Ontario. It was the home of a Boy Scout camp operated by the Central Illinois W. D. Boyce Council. Several Scout officials, including Chairman Lyle Honegger of Fairbury, pressed the Ontario Ministry of National Resources for the designation.

Harry Bach died in 1983 when he was 69 years old. Clarence Bach was 63 years old when he died in 1983. J. N. Bach Jr. was 95 years old when he died in 2008.

The Bach family had one member who served in WWI and another member who gave his life in World War II. They operated a lumberyard for 72 years at the southwest corner of Seventh and Locust Streets. Their old lumberyard building still stands today and is a rental storage space facility.



The former Bach lumberyard located at the southwest corner of  
Locust and Seventh Streets

## **CHAPTER 38**

### **Traffic Signal in Center of Main Street**

One of the most significant street intersections in Fairbury is Locust and Third Streets. Locust Street is Fairbury's "Main Street." That intersection was home to Walton's department store, the original City Hall, and the old Blade newspaper location. On Friday and Saturday nights, the farm families would come to Fairbury and shop at Walton's. These shoppers utilized every available parking spot on all sides of that intersection. For 25 years, Fairbury had the distinction of having a traffic signal in the center of the town's busiest intersection.

The first mention of any traffic signal at that intersection in the Blade newspaper was in 1933. In that era, the traffic signal was mounted on a heavy-duty cast iron post at the intersection's northeast corner.

In November of 1933, Harold Sims crashed his automobile into the traffic post. He broke off the pole, and it was rammed through the car, crushing the radiator, and passed into the passenger seat. The alcohol antifreeze burst into flames, and the fire department had to extinguish the fire. Mr. Sims was taken to the Mennonite hospital in Bloomington, and he recovered from his injuries.

In 1936, the traffic signal was removed from its post at the northeast corner of the intersection. A second cast-iron post was installed at the southwest corner of the intersection. The traffic signal was then hung on a cable that ran between the two poles, and it hung in the middle of the intersection.

In 1937, the traffic signal suspended from the cable was then found to be too low for large trucks. The Fairbury City Council voted to install the traffic light on a concrete post set in the center of the intersection. The base of the post was a one-ton chunk of concrete. This massive chunk of concrete was anchored in place with railroad track irons driven deep into the ground.

Over the years, numerous cars and trucks crashed into the concrete signal light in the center of the main intersection in Fairbury. A typical accident was illustrated by one that occurred in 1945. William Fancher was driving his truck down Locust Street on a rainy November Saturday night. His windshield wipers were broken, and he drove his vehicle into the concrete base. Mr. Fancher knocked the traffic lights off the top of the concrete base. The concrete base itself remained intact after the wreck.

In 1960, the Fairbury City Council voted to finally remove the traffic signal located in the intersection center. One new traffic signal would be placed at the southwest corner of the intersection. A second signal would be installed at the northeast corner of the intersection. According to the Blade newspaper archives, this plan was not actually implemented until 1962.

In a 1984 Blade editorial, Jim Roberts mentioned that Bob Spence was visiting in Fairbury after working at a Nebraska pipeline job. Spence was surprised to see the unique 36-light traffic signal at Third and Locust streets.

In 1988, the electrical traffic signals broke. Blade Editor Jim Roberts suggested the more straightforward stop signs were a good idea for that intersection. The City Council voted to replace the high-maintenance electrical traffic signals with simple stop signs.

One old postcard still exists today, showing the traffic signal on a concrete base in the Locust and Third Street intersection center. The photo is undated, but the automobiles in the old picture are from the 1940s.

The concrete base signal was in service for 25 years in Fairbury. It was installed in 1937 and removed in 1962. Many current citizens remember the old traffic signal located in the center of the intersection. In retrospect, the decision to put a concrete traffic signal in the middle of the city's busiest intersection was not one of our forefathers' wisest decisions.



Traffic Signal in Center of Intersection Between 1937 and 1962.

## Pantagraph Negative

The Pantagraph is releasing their old negatives and making them available to the public. On September 29, 1949, a Pantagraph photographer took a photo of elephants from Hill's Society Circus on Fairbury's Main Street and the traffic signal is in the photo.



1949 Photo of Traffic Signal by Pantagraph photographer

## **CHAPTER 39**

### **The Jerking Phenomena at the Methodist Avoca Church**

In 1858, word spread quickly about a highly unusual church revival meeting held at the Avoca Church a few miles north of Fairbury. Some revival attendees experienced a jerking phenomenon where their limbs jerked uncontrollably during the session.

This story began with the birth of William James Stubbles in Maryland in 1819. At this time, the parents of William J. Stubbles are unknown to genealogical researchers and his descendants. There is no record of William and his parents in the 1830 and 1840 Census. In the 1870 Census, William reported that his father and mother were of foreign birth. In the 1880 Census, William said his father was born in Maryland, and his mother was born in Ireland.

In 1841, William J. Stubbles married Sophia Ann Hotten in Belmont, Ohio. They had six children. In the 1850 Census, William and Sophia Stubbles were living in Belmont, Ohio. They reported three children living at home at that time, and William J. Stubbles reported his occupation as a laborer. Sometime between 1850 and 1860, William J. Stubbles became a minister of the Methodist Church. They also moved from Belmont, Ohio, to Onarga, Illinois by 1860.

In 1829, the McDowell family became the second family to settle in the Fairbury area. They settled about three miles north of Fairbury on Indian Creek and established the village of Avoca. Early church services were conducted in the home of the McDowell family.

In 1857, a new church was built at Avoca. The Avoca church building was made of oak and walnut trees cut from the Vermilion River banks and milled in Avoca by James and Woodford McDowell. Mrs. Sarah McDowell, the wife of William McDowell, first settlers of Avoca Township, named the church the Pioneer Methodist Episcopal Church. It

was dedicated Aug. 2, 1857, by the Rev. Zeddick Hall, then presiding elder of the Methodist Church.

In 1858, a revival meeting was held at the new Avoca Church. The guest minister who conducted the revival sessions was Rev. William J. Stubbles. These revival sessions often went on for several days.

According to the "Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois," one night, some of the revival goers got the "jerkers." Some danced and threw their arms forward and back with speed. Others worked their arms steadily, like a piece of machinery. Some moved their heads back and forth quickly. Others shuffled their feet in fast precision. Some jumped up and down for an hour at a time. None showed any sign of exhaustion at these antics.

Word spread quickly of the very unusual phenomena that took place at this revival session. People then came from miles around, filling the little church to standing capacity to witness this strange phenomenon.

Some of the "jerkers" were unable to work for weeks after the revival. Dr. Darius Johnson of Pontiac, who treated some of the patients, diagnosed either chorea or St. Vitus' dance. The "jerkers" were in possession of their senses but had no control over their bodies' muscular action. It was months before most of them recovered.

In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. The village of Fairbury was then founded in 1857. Mr. Stubbles, still stationed at Avoca, became pastor of the Fairbury Methodist Church when it was organized in mid-summer of 1858, a few months before a building was erected in the fall of '58. The original 32 by 55-foot frame structure was enlarged in 1866. Ten years later, a basement and one-story brick edifice was completed and dedicated, only to be destroyed on July 2, 1877, by a tornado. Another building was erected and dedicated on Jan. 20, 1878, to stand until torn down in 1905 and replaced.

In 1858, the Pantagraph published a story about the "jerkers" phenomena at Avoca. The article recounted that five weeks after the Avoca revival, another revival meeting was held by the Methodists at Indian Grove Township south of Fairbury. Several revival members experienced the jerks immediately after they converted to church members.



About seven weeks after the initial revival meeting was held at Avoca, another session was conducted at the Avoca church. As many as fifty revival attendees experienced the jerking phenomena.

The Pantagraph article recounted that a few previous occurrences of the jerks had been observed at church meetings around the country held by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers.

In that era, and continuing into the present day, ministers often stayed a few years in one town and then moved on to another city. In the 1860 Census, the Stubbles family had moved to Onarga, Illinois. Rev. Stubbles reported his occupation was a Methodist Clergyman. The Stubbles family had six children living at home.

By the 1870 Census, the Stubbles family had moved to Colchester, in western Illinois. Rev. Stubbles reported his occupation as a shoemaker. They had three children still living at home.

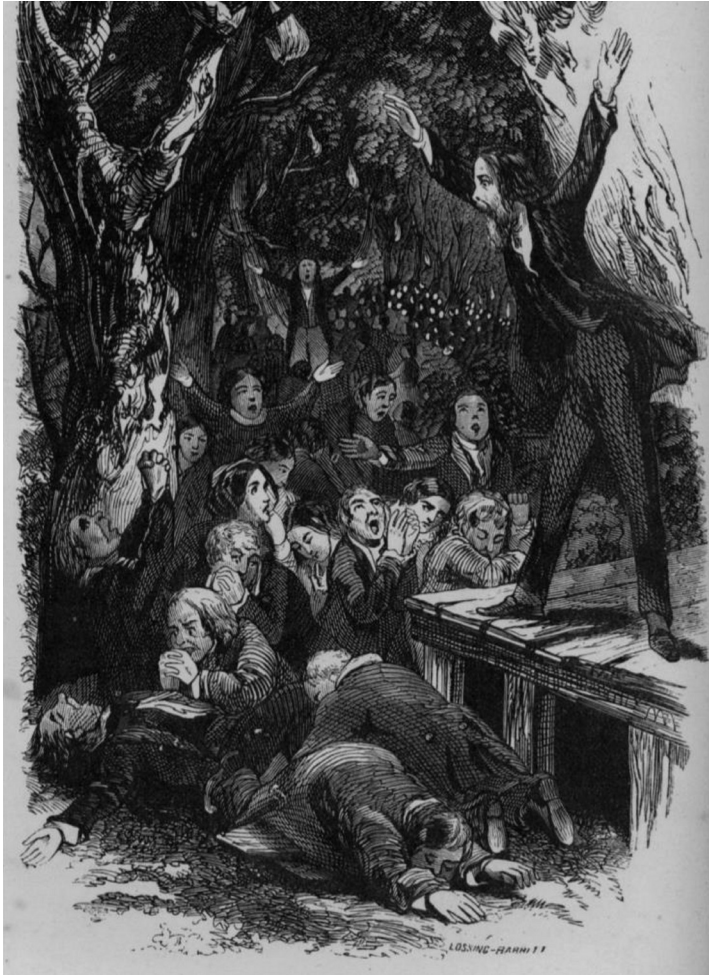
In the 1880 Census, Rev. Stubbles and Sophia were living in Henry, Illinois. He reported his occupation as a farmer. Son Charles Stubbles was the only child still living at home.

Sometime after 1880, the Stubbles family moved to the Springfield, Illinois area. Rev. Stubbles remained active in the Methodist church during the 1880s. He officiated at weddings and substituted for other ministers. Rev. Stubbles was also involved in the Springfield area temperance movement. Ministers and medical doctors often supported the temperance movements because they had to deal first-hand with the effects of alcoholic husbands on their families.

Rev. Stubbles died in 1890 in Springfield at the age of 71. He was buried in the Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield. One of his sons, Charles Sumner Stubbles, became a Peoria lawyer and eventually became an Illinois State Representative.

After the unusual jerking phenomena at the Avoca church in 1858, Rev. Stubbles continued to be a Methodist minister for 32 years until his death in 1890. Oddly, no further mentions of this jerking phenomena were

mentioned during his long career as a minister after the Avoca and Fairbury occurrences. Rev. Stubbles was one of the early pioneer Methodist clergymen in the Central Illinois area.



Samuel Goodrich's well-known illustration *The Jerking Exercise* associated the convulsive bodily fits with the preaching of the controversial Methodist itinerant Lorenzo Dow

## **CHAPTER 40**

### **Fairbury's African American History 1857-1922**

In 1976, President Gerald Ford officially recognized the month of February as Black History Month. President Ford called upon the public to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

One of the first Fairbury African American stories began with Dr. C. B. Ostrander. He was the first medical Doctor in the Fairbury area. He was also a staunch Abolitionist. One day he came into Fairbury and found a fugitive slave chained to the floor of a two-story building circa 1860. This fugitive slave was going to be returned to his master in Virginia. Using a crow-bar, sledgehammer, and chisel, the Doctor cut the shackles from the fugitive slave. He loaded the fugitive into a horse-drawn buggy and delivered him to Dr. C. V. Dyer in Chicago. Ostrander also gave the fugitive \$10 in cash. The slave was placed on the steamer "Illinois," commanded by Captain Blake. The boat transported him to freedom in Maiden, Canada. Dr. Ostrander was buried in Fairbury's Graceland cemetery.

A 1976 Blade story recounted that Fairbury had a station on the Underground Railway to help free slaves. The station was a little cabin north of Fairbury on the Vermilion River. The Blade recounted this portion of the Underground Railway ran between Strawn and Odell. Unfortunately, the Blade story gave no reference to the source of this information. No modern-day evidence could be found to support this story.

The first written mention of African Americans living in Fairbury occurred in the 1878 Livingston County history book by William Le Baron. This history book recounted that one of the most unusual and exciting incidents in Fairbury was the first black man to vote in an election. The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified on February 3, 1870. This Amendment granted African American men the right to vote in elections.

Fairbury held a township officer election just a few days after the 15th Amendment was ratified. Richard Quarles, an African American man living in Fairbury, was widely known as "Side Hill Dick" because one of his legs was several inches shorter than the other leg. He listed his occupation in the Census as a boot-black. So many Fairbury citizens wanted to witness the historical event of Richard Quarles voting that the history book said it was almost a circus atmosphere on election day. This book recounted that nobody challenged the right of Mr. Quarles to vote, and no issues were encountered when he voted in the township election.

Alma Lewis James, a Fairbury historian, recounted in her book *Stuffed Clubs & Antimaccassars* another incident involving Richard Quarles. John Virgin was a prominent Fairbury businessman. He imported Percheron horses from France and sold them to Fairbury area farmers. One day, Virgin came upon a fistfight in the street. A crowd had gathered to watch a drunk white man start a fight with the disabled Richard Quarles. John Virgin immediately stepped in and broke up the fight.

Michael Lucas Sullivant started farming his 40,000-acre farm in 1867 in what we now call Sibley, Illinois. He needed 140 men to operate his farm, the largest in the United States at that time. Mr. Sullivant encountered some massive financial headwinds. The first problem was the Panic of 1873. This panic was a financial crisis that triggered a worldwide economic depression. In addition to the Panic of 1873, Burr Oak farm experienced three bad harvest years in a row. Mr. Sullivant was unable to make the interest payments due to his lenders. He laid-off many of the farmworkers, and his creditors took over the farm in 1878. Many of these laid-off black farm workers moved to Fairbury.

The 1878 history book recounted there were about 100 African Americans living in Fairbury in that era. There were enough African Americans in Fairbury to support a church, the A.M.E., or African Methodist Episcopal Church. This church was located at the southwest corner of Walnut and Second Streets in Fairbury.

The Sanborn Insurance company made maps of Fairbury for five different years between 1885 and 1911. The 1885 Sanborn map of Fairbury shows the A.M.E. church located at 200 South Second Street. There was a large feed barn between the church and the alley to the south. This map proves

this church was built sometime before 1885. This same church is also shown on the 1911 Sanborn map, which is the last year of making these maps. Unfortunately, there are no known photos of this church.

In 1898, Rev. C. H. Sheen was the pastor of this church. In the December 1907 Blade, the A.M.E. church held a possum supper as a fundraising event. The pastor for both the Fairbury and Pontiac A.M.E. churches in 1921 was the Rev. A. A. Sheen.

A review of the 1880 U.S. Census found 92 African Americans were living in Fairbury and the three townships that make up the Fairbury area (Avoca, Indian Grove, and Belle Prairie). This number of 92 is relatively close to the population of 100 referred to in the 1878 history book.

One surprising finding of the 1880 Census review was that 76 out of the 92 African Americans living in Fairbury were born in the same state of Tennessee. It is unknown why so many people came from the same area to live in Fairbury. The population of Fairbury was 2,140 citizens. If there were about 100 African Americans living in Fairbury, they represented 4.7% of the total population.

Many photographs from the early 1900s illustrate that Fairbury schools were fully integrated. For example, an old picture of the 1903 Fairbury Township football team shows the high school team had 12 team members. Two of the players, Dan McLain and Jim Walker, were African Americans.

African Americans attended the same schools as whites and were also buried in the same Graceland Cemetery. African Americans also participated in civic events. The 1976 Blade ran a series of historical Fairbury photographs. One of these was an undated photograph of a community sack race held on Locust Street. In the picture, Richard Quarles was one of the contestants in this sack race.



The 1903 Fairbury football team featured two African Americans. Team members in the front row included Tom Westervelt, Harry Perlee, Fred Carrithers, Ray Chapman, and Clarence Dexter. In the second row was Dan McLain, Merle Gardineer, Jim Walker, and Gary Veeder. In the third row was Ray Scriven, Coach Friedman, Fred Perlee, and H. B. Bedell.

## **CHAPTER 41**

### **Fairbury's African American History 1923-2021**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to Indiana. From its founding until the early 1920s, as many as 100 African Americans lived peacefully in Fairbury. The African Methodist Episcopal church was built before 1885 and was located at the southwest corner of Walnut and Second streets. The children of African Americans were fully integrated into the Fairbury school system and were members of the high school athletic teams. Deceased African Americans were buried in Graceland cemetery with the other white citizens.

In 1915, D. W. Griffith produced the silent film "The Birth of a Nation." This film mythologized the founding of the Ku Klux Klan. An old Fairbury photograph has an advertisement for this silent film, which was shown at the Third Street Opera House.

This film helped launch a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Midwest in the early 1920s. In the 1923-1926 era, the Ku Klux Klan held recruiting events in all the small towns around Fairbury. Three meetings of the KKK were held in Fairbury. The first meeting was held in September of 1923. Five to eight thousand people from all over the state gathered in a field at the Bartle Steidinger farm north of Fairbury. A small fiery cross was at the gate, with two larger ones in the center of the field. One of these crosses was red, and the other white, and both signs were electric lighted. The white cross was ten or twelve feet high and could be seen for quite a distance. On the night of the meeting, 165 men were initiated as members of the KKK.

In October of 1923, Reverend Patton of Assumption, Illinois, gave a KKK recruiting speech in Fairbury. On June 27, 1924, a Klan meeting was held at the W. D. Spence farm south of Fairbury. In October of 1924, a county-wide meeting of the KKK was held at Pontiac's Chautauqua Park.

In May of 1924, an Illinois miner's state convention was held with 800 coal mining union representatives in attendance. Two of those representatives were Fairbury coal miners. They were Edward Carlson, President, and R.A. McAllister, Secretary of the Fairbury local union.

The two Fairbury coal miners were among the most strenuous opponents the Klan faced on a convention floor. The resolution introduced by Carlson and McAllister made membership in the KKK organization an impossibility for any miner. The convention adopted the Fairbury proposal.

The Fairbury Blade newspaper has many stories about the KKK between 1923 and 1926. The resurgence movement of the KKK lost steam nationally in the late 1920s. Consequently, there are no Fairbury Blade KKK related stories after 1926.

The highest racial tensions in Fairbury occurred in 1928. Twenty-nine-year-old James Churchill was driving a heavy horse-drawn wagon full of rock on First Street by the Vermilion River. In those days, cars were supposed to give the right-a-way to the massive horse-drawn wagons. Thirty-year-old Leroy Harice Carter was a young African American who lived in Fairbury. Leroy went fishing in the Vermilion River with three older African American women. Leroy was driving an automobile owned by one of the women. This group finished fishing and started to go back to Fairbury on First Street. When the car encountered the heavy horse-drawn wagon, there was a heated argument about who had the right-a-way on the road. The automobile finally went around the wagon and went to Fairbury.

When the car reached Fairbury, passenger Livera Word told driver Leroy Carter the wagon incident was not right. She then urged him to take her gun and go back and shoot James Churchill. Leroy and Livera drove north on First Street, and he murdered James Churchill.

The police arrested Leroy Carter and took him to the county jail in Pontiac. Then a group of Fairbury men started towards Pontiac to lynch Leroy Carter for murdering James Churchill. The County Sheriff anticipated this problem. The Sheriff posted his deputies on the roads coming into Pontiac. The deputies met the Fairbury men and convinced them to return to



Fairbury. Both Leroy Carter and Livera Word were given prison sentences for the murder of James Churchill.

A couple of nights after the murder, at about 10:30 PM, a party of men in automobiles drove out to Mr. and Mrs. Will Grisson's house south of Fairbury. Mr. Grisson was an African American farmer who worked for Sam Fendrick and other farmers in that neighborhood. The men in the automobile planted a burning cross in the Grisson's yard.

When a Blade reporter and Deputy Sheriff Hartley drove out that way the next morning, they met Mr. Grisson walking to town. He said he was coming into town to telegraph for money for himself and his wife to get out of Fairbury. In talking of the previous evening's affair, Mr. Grisson said there were some six or seven cars. The occupants of these cars put a burning cross in the yard and then shot at the house. The shot rattled against the windows, and some of it entered the side of the house. Mr. Grisson recounted that following the shooting, he and his wife blew out the lights. They then ran out the back door and across the fields to Quill Morris's home, where they remained all night. Mr. Grisson stated that the men did not try to enter the house. He said the cross was kept burning until about two o'clock in the morning. These same cars drove through the northwest part of town where some African Americans lived, and several shots were fired.

The U.S. Census shows an African American population in Fairbury of 92 in 1880, 62 in 1910, 24 in 1920, 50 in 1930, 20 in 1940, and 16 in the year 2000. The population of 24 in 1920 seems low and might be a data research error. Common last names in the Census were Brown, Sears, Somerville, and Word. Over-all, the population of African Americans in Fairbury trended downwards after a peak of 92 residents in 1880.

An African Methodist Episcopal church yearbook shows the Fairbury church was still operating in 1967. Between 1968 and 1970, some current Fairbury men recall attending Boy Scout meetings in the little church. A new home was built on the same site in 1972, indicating the old church was torn down sometime between 1967 and 1972.

African Americans have always been fully integrated into Fairbury society. Since the founding of Fairbury, they have been essential contributors to the success of the community.



The Fairbury African Methodist Episcopal church was located at the southwest corner of Walnut and Second Street

## **CHAPTER 42**

### **Two Fairbury Citizens Reaching 117 Years of Age Created National News**

Fairbury made the national newspapers in January of 1917. Two citizens of Fairbury, Stephen Young and Sophia Lancaster, died in the same week. Each of these Fairbury citizens was purported to be 117 years old. Both of these citizens were African Americans, and both were former slaves.

For Stephen Young to be 117 years old when he died, his birth year needed to be around 1801. His obituary in the Pantagraph recounted that he was born in 1800 in Tennessee. He was a slave for sixty years. Stephen served as a cook in Wilder's Brigade in the Civil War. After the Civil War ended, he married and moved to Fairbury. Mr. Young worked as a teamster for 43 years in Fairbury. Stephen Young's wife, Julia, died in 1903. He spent his last few years living at the county farm, officially known as the Livingston County Poor Farm.

Wilder's Brigade was an Indiana unit in the Civil War. During the American Civil War, John Thomas Wilder was an officer in the Union Army, noted principally for capturing the critical mountain pass of Hoover's Gap during the Tullahoma Campaign in Central Tennessee in June 1863. Wilder had personally ensured that his "Lightning Brigade" of mounted infantry was equipped with the new Spencer repeating rifle. He initially had to appeal to his men to pay for these weapons themselves before the government agreed to carry the cost. The victory at Hoover's Gap was mainly attributed to Wilder's persistence in procuring the new rifles, which totally disoriented the enemy.

A genealogical search found no mention of Stephen in any U.S. Census before 1870. In the 1870 Census, Stephen Young and his wife Julia were living in Lebanon, Tennessee. Stephen listed his year of birth as 1827, and he was a farm laborer. Thomas Young, age 14, was living with them. The relationship between Thomas and Mr. and Mrs. Young is unknown.

The 1880 U.S. Census finds Stephen and Julia Young living in Fairbury. Stephen listed his birth year as 1819, and his occupation was a farmer. Adopted son Robert Young and grandson John Young were living with them.

No 1890 Census data is available because the census records were destroyed in a fire in 1921. In the 1900 Census, Stephen and his wife Julia were still living in Fairbury, and his occupation was as a teamster. Stephen listed his birth date as 1816.

In the 1910 Census, Stephen Young was widowed and was still living in Fairbury. His birth year was 1801. He died on January 19, 1917. Stephen and his wife Julia Ann are buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery in the older section along South Seventh Street. A newer stone, not a 1917 era stone, is at the grave.

In June of 1959, the Blade published a story about war veterans buried in Graceland Cemetery. This article recounted that Stephen Young was a wagon driver with the Third Illinois Cavalry, Company K. The Blade noted that if Mr. Young had been a regular enlisted soldier, he would have been the oldest veteran of the Civil War. Stephen Young is not shown in the current Civil War databases for Illinois and Indiana veterans.

The Third Illinois Cavalry Company K was made up of almost all Fairbury men. If Mr. Young served with this unit as a wagon driver, it would make sense that he decided to move from Tennessee to Fairbury after the war.

Julia Ann Young died on November 15, 1903. She was born in 1825 and died at the age of 78. Julia spent the first 30 years of her life as a slave. After being freed, she married Stephen Young in 1865 in Tennessee. On the marriage license, her name was listed as Julia Young. Her maiden name is unknown. Mr. and Mrs. Young moved to Fairbury in 1875. Her obituary said one son and a grandson survived her. All her other relatives had already passed away.

The 1917 obituary for Sophia Lancaster recounted that she was born in 1799 in Tennessee. She was also a former slave. Sophia came to live with her daughter, Mrs. John Walker, in Fairbury, about 1907. Her four children

survived her. The obituary stated that Sophia had papers she received from her first slave master's son, which documented her birth date.

In the 1870 Census, she was married to Thomas Lancaster and was living in Lebanon, Tennessee. Thomas Lancaster was born in 1840. Sophia listed her birth year as 1840. They had two children, Fannie and Cilly, living with them.

Sophia and her husband were still living in Lebanon, Tennessee, in the 1880 census. Sophia listed her birth year as 1835. In the 1900 U.S. Census, Sophia enumerated her birth year as 1824. She was living with her husband, Thomas, in Lebanon.

After reviewing all the genealogical data for Stephen Young and Sophia Lancaster, it is unlikely that either one was 117 years old. Stephen Young gave the census takers the differing birth years of 1827, 1819, 1816, and 1801. His wife was born in 1825. It would be unlikely that Mrs. Young would marry a man 24 years her senior in age.

In the case of Sophia Lancaster, it is unlikely that Thomas Lancaster would marry a woman that was 40 years older than he was. Unfortunately, no copies of her paperwork are known to exist today.

Statistically, it is extremely improbable for anyone to live to be 117 years old. The chances of two people, both reaching 117 and dying in the same week in the same town, are astronomical. This statistical improbability explains why this news story was so exciting and why it was published in so many newspapers all around the United States.

Maybe at some future date, additional documentation will be discovered that better establishes these two unique Fairbury citizens' real ages.



Stephen Young was purported to be 117 years of age when he died in 1917. He is buried in the oldest section of Graceland Cemetery along south Seventh Street.

## **CHAPTER 43**

### **Interesting Fairbury Civil War Veteran**

One of Fairbury's fascinating citizens was John W. Posey. His story began with his birth in 1847 in Kentucky. John was the son of John M. Posey and Maria Gundecker. John W. Posey grew up in Greenup, Kentucky, 125 miles southeast of Cincinnati, Ohio.

One historical record recounts that John moved to Fredonia, N.Y. in 1862, and enlisted in the Union Army when he was age 15. John joined in the 31st New York colored infantry Company G. and served until the war ended in 1865.

A second New York Civil War record indicates that John W. Posey enlisted in the colored infantry in August of 1864. He served until November of 1865. A third Civil War record recounts that he joined at his home in Greenup on April 3, 1865. This date was just a few weeks before the war ended when General Lee surrendered to General Grant.

The 31st Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops, was a regiment raised in New York State during the American Civil War that recruited black soldiers. This unit took part in the Battle of Cold Harbor and the sieges of Petersburg and Richmond.

After the Civil War ended, John returned to Greenup, Kentucky, and became a farm laborer. In the 1870 U.S. Census, John was living with his parents and six siblings. In 1878, at the age of 31, John married Eva M. Gaylord in De Witt County, Illinois. Eva was 21 years old when she married John Posey.

In the 1880 Census, John and Eva Posey were living in Paxton, Illinois. John's occupation was a barber. John's race was recorded as mulatto on the census form, and Eva's race was white.

Old Paxton Record newspapers chronicle the life of John Posey while he lived in Paxton. The first mention of John Posey is his marriage to Eva Gaylord in 1878. The second mention was in 1881 when it was reported

that John Posey would give customers a nice shave in his underground barber shop under the Ford County Bank. Many small towns, including Fairbury and Paxton, had small businesses that operated in larger stores' basements.

John and Eva Posey had a son in 1883. In 1884, they bought a house in Paxton. John Posey then moved his barbershop from the bank basement to Coomer's drug store. John and Eva Posey added a daughter to their family in 1885.

In 1885, the Eastern Illinois Register published an article by the editor titled "The Campfire." This article alleged the cruelties faced by Union soldiers held at the Andersonville prison camp were greatly exaggerated. The consensus of historians today is that one-third of the Union prisoners held at this camp perished due to disease and starvation.

The article incensed the Civil War veterans living in Paxton. Seventy of these Civil War veterans, including John Posey, published a letter with their names in the Paxton newspaper. The veterans complained the article in the Eastern Illinois Register was false and misleading.

In 1886, John Posey advertised that he would give his customers a Sunday shave for 15 cents. This amount would be equivalent to \$4.32 in today's dollars. Also, in 1886, John Posey invested money in the Paxton Building & Loan Association. John invested several times in this institution while he lived in Paxton.

In 1887, the tragic Chatsworth Train Wreck occurred. Thousands of people journeyed to see the wreckage site. John Posey and five other Paxton men traveled to Chatsworth to see the wreck. The wreck site was terrible, but they reported the worst part was seeing the torn and mangled bodies laid out in the Chatsworth town hall waiting to be identified by relatives.

In July of 1888, John Posey left his barbershop and went home. He found his 30-year-old wife, Eva, lying across the sidewalk in front of their porch. John checked his wife, and she was dead. Some Paxton residents thought that John had murdered his wife.



An autopsy and inquest were then held. John Posey testified that his wife suffered from fainting spells. Mrs. Posey had a wound penetrating to the bone on the bridge of her nose. She also had a broken neck. The inquest theorized that she was ironing and walked onto the porch to take a break. Mrs. Posey then fainted and fell down the front steps to her death. The final verdict of the coroner's jury was accidental death. The Paxton city Pauper's Relief Fund was used to pay the \$10 cost of the post mortem examination of Mrs. Posey.

Because of the death of his wife, John Posey was responsible for raising their three young children. Two years after his wife died, John turned his three children over to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Normal, Illinois. This institution was established in 1865 by the Illinois State legislature as a home for the indigent children of Civil War veterans. Jesse W. Fell, David Davis, and other prominent residents of Bloomington and Normal pledged cash and land for the home. It was later renamed the Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Children's School. After 114 years of operation, it was closed in 1979.

In 1894, at the age of 47, John Posey married Lavina Babb from Fairbury. John and Lavina Posey lived in Fairbury, and they had two children. Their children attended Fairbury schools.

In 1905, at the age of 58, John Posey died. His funeral was held at the A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church in Fairbury. Rev. Ford officiated at the funeral. This small church was located at the southwest corner of Second and Walnut Streets. This church was torn down around 1969. John Posey was buried at Graceland Cemetery.

John W. Posey lived a fascinating life. He was born in Kentucky and served in the Union Army in the Civil War. He was a barber and an active member of Paxton in the 1880s. He lived the last portion of his life in Fairbury. His name was often read on Memorial Day when the names of all the veterans buried in Graceland were recited.



John Posey was an African American Civil War soldier and is buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery

## **CHAPTER 44**

### **Area Woman Served as Soldier in Civil War**

In the Civil War, the Illinois 3rd Cavalry Company K was made up of almost all Fairbury area men. One of this unit's significant battles occurred at Guntown, Mississippi. Another Illinois military unit, the 95th Illinois Infantry Company G, also fought with Fairbury's Company K in the Guntown battle.

In the 95th Infantry Company G was a soldier named Albert Cashier. In the State of Illinois Civil War database, the soldier's name is misspelled as Albert D.J. Cashire. At the time of his enlistment, Albert was 19 years old, was five foot three inches in height, with auburn hair and blue eyes, with a light complexion. Albert said he was single and was a farmer from New York City, New York. Albert enlisted in Company G on August 6, 1862. Albert enlisted in Belvedere, Illinois, and Elliott N. Bush joined him to the military.

Albert Cashier fought for the Union Army for just over three years. He was mustered out in August of 1865 at Camp Butler, Illinois, by Captain Hall. Albert's 95th Infantry fought at the battles of Raymond, Jackson, Champion's Hill, Big Black River, Vicksburg, Pleasant Hill, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, and Jonesboro.

At the Siege of Vicksburg, Cashier was captured while performing reconnaissance. Cashier managed to escape, however, and make his way back to the regiment. After the Battle of Vicksburg, in June 1863, Cashier contracted chronic diarrhea and entered a military hospital. After recovering in the hospital, Cashier returned to active duty.

Throughout the war, Cashier's unit traveled a total of about 9,000 miles during its term. Other soldiers thought that Cashier was small and preferred to be alone, which were not uncommon characteristics for soldiers.

After the war, Cashier returned to Belvedere, Illinois, where he worked for Samuel Pepper. He then settled in Saunemin, Illinois, in 1869. In

Saunemin, he worked as a farmhand as well as performing odd jobs around the town. Albert Cashier can be found on records of the town payroll.

His employer there, Joshua Chesebro, built a one-room house for him. For over forty years, he lived in Saunemin and was a church janitor, cemetery worker, and street lamplighter. Albert voted in elections and later claimed a veteran's pension under the name Albert Cashier.

In later years, he ate with the neighboring Lannon family. Later on, when Albert fell ill, the Lannon family discovered that he was female when they asked a nurse to examine her. The family did not make their discovery public that Albert was really a female.

In 1911, Cashier was hit by a car that broke her leg. A physician discovered her secret in the hospital but did not disclose the information. On May 5, 1911, because she was no longer able to work, Cashier was moved to the Soldiers and Sailors home in Quincy, Illinois. During this stay, Hodggers was visited by many of her fellow soldiers from the Ninety-fifth Regiment. She lived there until her mental state deteriorated, and she was moved to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane in March 1914.

Attendants at the Watertown State Hospital discovered that she was female when giving her a bath, at which point she was made to wear women's clothes again after fifty years.

Albert Cashier died on October 10, 1915. She was buried in the Civil War uniform she had kept intact all those years, and her tombstone was inscribed "Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95 Ill. Inf." Albert Cashier was given an official Grand Army of the Republic funeral service and was buried with full military honors.

It took W.J. Singleton (executor of Cashier's estate) nine years to track Cashier's identity back to her birth name of Jennie Hodggers. None of the heirs proved convincing, and the estate of \$418.46 was deposited in the Adams County, Illinois, treasury. In the 1970s, a second tombstone, inscribed with both of her names, was placed beside the first.

After she died in 1915, further research found that her real name was Jennie Irene Hodgers. Hodgers was born in Clogherhead, County Louth, Ireland, on December 25, around the year 1843. According to a later investigation by the administrator of her estate, she was the child of Sallie and Patrick Hodgers.

Hodgers's later accounts of how she moved to the United States and why she enlisted were taken when she was elderly and disoriented. She was also typically evasive about her earlier life; therefore, those narratives were contradictory. Usually, she was said to have been dressed in boy's clothing by her stepfather to find work. Even before the advent of the war, Hodgers adopted the identity of Albert Cashier to work. Her mother died sometime in her youth. By 1862, Hodgers had traveled as a stowaway to Illinois and was living in Belvedere.

It turns out that over 400 women served as men during the Civil War. Albert's case is unique because she continued to act like a man after the war was over. Lon P. Dawson, a veteran who lived at the Illinois Veterans Home where Cashier once lived, wrote a biography about her titled "Also Known As Albert D. J. Cashier: The Jennie Hodgers Story." The novel "My Last Skirt" by Lynda Durrant is based on her life.

Cashier's grave can be seen at the Sunny Slope Cemetery in Saunemin. A video about the life of Jennie Hodgers/Albert Cashier can be viewed on YouTube. Cashier's little house has been restored in Saunemin. A graduate student at Loyola University is working on a project to add the small house to the National Register of Historic Places.



Civil War Private Albert D. J. Cashier  
photographed in uniform in November of  
1864

## **CHAPTER 45**

### **Fairbury Nursing Hero Part of Bob Hope Show**

Two Fairbury sisters each received a Bronze Star medal for their bravery going into battle with the troops on New Guinea island in World War II. One of these sisters then starred with Bob Hope on one of his entertainment shows he conducted for the military troops.

This story started with the birth of James Flanagan in Ohio in 1852. When James was seven years old, his family moved from Ohio to Chenoa. James grew up in Chenoa and married Catherine Dunn in 1876. Some of their eight children were born in Chenoa.

In 1883, James and Catherine Flanagan had a son they named Martin Francis Flanagan. Two years later, James Flanagan moved his family from Chenoa to a farm between Summerfield and Beattie in Kansas. James Flanagan died in Kansas in 1910, and his wife Catherine Flanagan died there in 1938.

The Dilley family's story began with James Monroe Dilley's birth in 1864 in Carroll County, Illinois. This county is located in the northwest corner of Illinois. The family of James Dilley moved to Beattie, Kansas, when James was a boy. In 1885, James Dilley married Anna J. Martin in Kansas. They had six children and one of their daughters they named Adeline J. Dilley.

In 1914, Adeline J. Dilley married Martin F. Flanagan in Kansas. They eventually had eight daughters and two sons. In 1917, Martin Flanagan moved his family from Kansas to Fairbury to farm Michael Flanagan's land. Martin was the nephew of Michael Flanagan. In 1919, Martin and Adeline Flanagan had a daughter in Fairbury named Julia Flanagan. After farming his uncle's land for two years, Martin Flanagan moved his family back to Kansas. John Darnall took over farming the land of Michael Flanagan. Julia Flanagan was one of the ten children who were born in Fairbury.

Martin Flanagan became a very well-known resident of Beattie, Kansas. He became a grain buyer and managed the Summerfield elevator. In 1932, Martin was elected to the first of two terms as the Marshall County Sheriff. In 1938, at the age of 45, Martin Flanagan moved back to Fairbury to farm his uncle's land north of town. His older children attended Fairbury Township High School.

In 1941, Julia Flanagan entered the St. Joseph School of Nursing in Bloomington. Both Julia and her sister Margaret Flanagan graduated as nurses from St. Joseph's. America entered World War II in December 1941 after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

After the war started, Patrick Flanagan, son of Martin and Adeline Flanagan, entered the U.S. Navy at Chicago. Patrick served in Africa, France, and the Western Pacific. Patrick was discharged in 1946 as a Chief Pharmacist's Mate in Chicago.

In 1942, Martin Flanagan had a farm sale. He retired from farming and moved to a home in Fairbury.

In 1943, three more members of the Martin Flanagan family entered World War II. Sisters Margaret and Julia Flanagan, both registered nurses, were appointed to the Army Nurse Corps as Second Lieutenants. Another sister, Mary Flanagan, entered the Woman's Naval Reserve.

Mary Flanagan was stationed at the Naval Unit at the University of Colorado. She was discharged in 1947 at Clearfield, Utah, as Yeoman Second Class.

The Bronze Star Medal is a United States decoration awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone.

The first tour of duty for sisters Margaret and Julia Flanagan was at Papua, New Guinea, an island north of Australia. The two nurses were in the first wave of nurses to go ashore during battle conditions. Both Margaret and Julia Flanagan were awarded the Bronze Star for their heroic service in the battle of New Guinea. Both sisters also each received the Asiatic-Pacific and America Theatre ribbons.



World War II ended in September of 1945 when Japan surrendered to the United States. In April of 1945, Julia Flanagan married naval Lieutenant William G. Livingston in California, where they were stationed. Mr. Livingston was from Bloomington, Illinois.

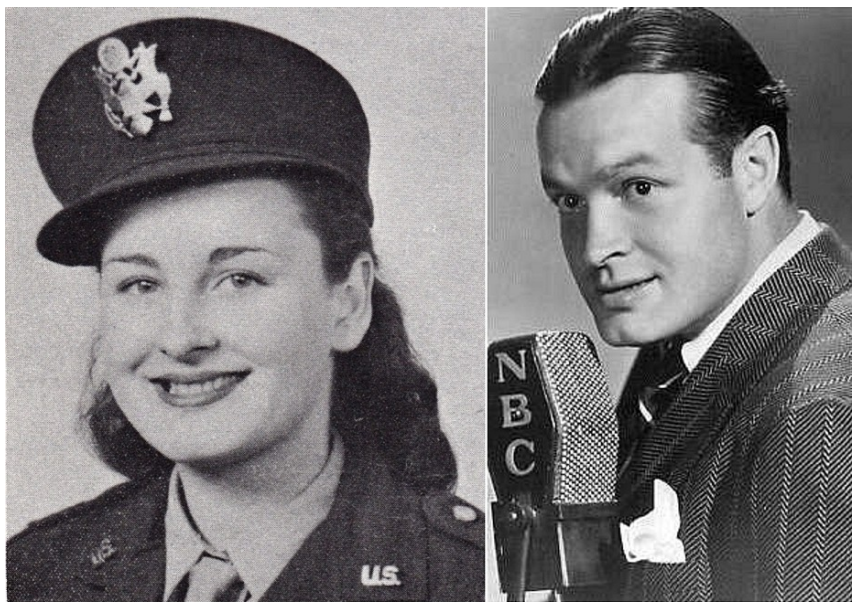
During World War II, Bob Hope, a famous entertainer in that era, conducted many shows to entertain American military personnel. On May 15, 1945, Bob Hope held one of his performances at the Birmingham Hospital in California.

Fairbury-born nurse Julia Flanagan participated in the Bob Hope show. Julia and Bob Hope exchanged comedic banter back and forth for about three minutes during that show. An audio copy of this exchange was found, and it can be heard on the Fairbury Echoes Museum website.

After the war ended, sisters Margaret and Julia Flanagan were released from their military service. In 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Flanagan became the new proprietors of Hotel Fairbury. They took over from Mr. and Mrs. George Marshall, who retired. Mr. Flanagan had run a large restaurant in Kansas before, and Mrs. Flanagan had an excellent reputation as a good cook.

Martin and Adeline Flanagan decided to end their lease of the Hotel Fairbury at the end of 1947. The Blade reported the couple had done an excellent job of running the hotel. Since most of the Flanagan family was then located in California, and Martin's health was poor, they decided to move from Fairbury to California.

The Flanagan family sent four members to World War II. Sisters Margaret and Julia Flanagan received the Bronze Star medal for their brave service at the island of New Guinea. Fairbury-born nurse Julia Flanagan got the chance to appear with famous entertainer Bob Hope in one of his military entertainment shows in California shortly before World War II concluded.



Fairbury-born nurse Julia Flanagan appeared in one of Bob Hope's entertainment shows for military personnel during World War II

## **CHAPTER 46**

### **Unlucky at Love**

In the Spring of 1940, Fairbury citizens were shocked to learn that a woman was shot in a house near the city waterworks on South First Street. This story began with the birth of Frank Henry Fonger in Bloomington, Illinois, in 1860. In 1883, when he was 23 years old, he married Miss Mary E. Mitchell. She was born in Bloomington in 1863. Frank and Mary had three children.

In 1903, at the age of 39, Mary Fonger died in Bloomington. She was survived by her husband, Frank Fonger, with their three children. When Mary died, his son Gordon Fonger was age 17, his son Percy was 13, and his daughter Elsie was just five years old.

Forty-three-year-old widower Frank Fonger then married twenty-year-old Miss Emma Grace Stanton. Emma was born in Leroy, Illinois. Emma Grace was commonly called Grace Fonger. Frank and Grace had no children of their own.

Frank worked in Bloomington as a night watchman at the C. D. Jones garage. In 1934, at the age of 73, Frank Fonger died in Bloomington. He and Grace had been married for 30 years. Grace was just 51 years old when her first husband died.

Charles Hargesheimer was born in 1862 in Lovett, Indiana. He grew up in Indiana and then moved to Illinois. Charles worked in Cropsey and Colfax's vicinity until about 1900 when he bought a farm near Foosland. Charles moved to Fairbury in 1920.

In 1901, at the age of 39, Charles Hargesheimer married Martha Jane Vance. Martha was 26 years old and was born in Jennings County, Indiana. Unfortunately, just four years later, Martha died in 1905 at the age of 30. Charles and Martha Hargesheimer had no children.

Two years after the death of his first wife, Charles Hargesheimer married Minnie K. Travis in 1907. Minnie was 34 years old when she married

Charles. Minnie was born in 1873 in Belle Prairie Township, south of Fairbury.

Charles and Minnie Hargesheimer were married for 27 years, and then Minnie died in 1934. Minnie was 61 years old when she died. Charles and Minnie had no children.

In 1936, Charles Hargesheimer married Grace Fonger. When they married, Charles was 74 years of age, and Grace was 53 years old. This marriage was the third for Charles and the second for Grace. They lived south of Fairbury in a farmhouse. Their house was across the street from the Fairbury Water Works. Leroy Johnson was their hired hand. The farmhouse no longer exists and was replaced by the small Timberline Drive subdivision.

Three years later, in 1939, Charles Hargesheimer died at the age of 77 on September 24, 1939. Grace became a widow a second time at the age of 56. Charles was buried in a Leroy cemetery.

Leroy Grover Johnson was born in Fairbury in 1912. He was the son of John Frank Johnson and Carrie C. Sweet. In 1940, Leroy Johnson was 28 years old. Leroy married 57-year-old Grace Hargesheimer in Fairbury on January 29, 1940. Grace's second husband had only been dead for four months when she married Leroy Johnson. They moved into Grace's home on South First Street. After one month of marriage, they separated.

About three months after the marriage, Grace called Fairbury undertaker George Mowery. She called him around nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. Mr. Mowery said he was busy, but Grace insisted he come immediately to her home. Mr. Mowery decided he would go to Grace's house directly. He found her partially disrobed in her bed, with blood everywhere. Grace was incoherent and bleeding. Grace told Mr. Mowery that someone had come into her home and shot her. Grace was transported to the Fairbury Hospital.

Sheriff Davis immediately took Leroy Johnson and Harold Hanna, who had been doing chores for Mrs. Johnson, to Pontiac for questioning.

An investigation of the house found a .32 caliber revolver and a .22 caliber rifle in the home. On Wednesday afternoon, Sheriff Davis and Fairbury City Marshal Cooper questioned Mrs. Johnson in the Fairbury Hospital. Grace recounted that she was very upset about a certain sum of money she had given to Leroy Johnson when they separated. Grace was also anxious about some legal papers she had signed when she separated from her husband. Grace admitted her gunshot wounds were self-inflicted. Leroy Johnson and Harold Hanna were released as soon as Grace confessed her self-inflicted injuries.

On Thursday afternoon, Grace still had internal bleeding. Doctors operated, but Grace died from internal bleeding and shock. Funeral services were held the following Sunday at the Mowry Funeral Home in Fairbury. Grace was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery at Leroy. Her first husband, Frank Fonger, and her second husband, Charles Hargesheimer, were buried in this same cemetery.

Leroy G. Johnson went on to serve in World War II. Soon after the war ended, Leroy married Helen C. Hoops. She was the divorced wife of Ralph V. Romig, a long-time Fairbury sign painter. Leroy and Helen Johnson lived in Indiana. Leroy died in 1964 at the age of 52.

Grace Scranton was happily married to her first husband for 30 years before he died. Her second husband only lived for three years after they were married. It is unknown why 57-year-old Grace married 28-year-old Leroy Johnson only three months after her second husband died. Grace apparently became very upset about her quick decision to marry for a third time to a much younger man. In retrospect, Grace Stanton was very unlucky at love.



House on South First Street where Grace Stanton shot herself in 1940 just three months after marrying for a third time.

## **CHAPTER 47**

### **Fairbury Man was Trapeze Artist and World-Class Model Builder**

Thomas Hornsby Jr. was born and raised in Fairbury. His childhood dream was to perform in the circus. Thomas Hornsby fulfilled his boyhood dream, and he dazzled audiences on the flying trapeze as "Fearless Tommy Hornsby."

The story of Thomas Hornsby Jr. started in the coal country of England. His paternal great-grandparents were William and Mary Hornsby. The maternal great-grandparents of Thomas Hornsby Jr. were Thomas and Frances Hetherington. Both William Hornsby and Thomas Hetherington were born in County Durham in the northeastern coal fields of England.

These two families emigrated to America and eventually came to Fairbury because of the available coal mining jobs. Robert Lynn Hornsby Sr. (1854-1915) was the son of William and Mary Hornsby. Jane Hetherington (1865-1938) was the daughter of Thomas and Frances Hetherington. Robert and Jane married and eventually settled in Fairbury. Robert Hornsby Sr. was a coal miner, and he had 11 children.

One of Robert and Jane Hornsby's children was Thomas Hornsby Sr. (1883-1964). He was born in Fairbury and married Maude Ellen Harris in 1903. Thomas and Maude had 12 children in Fairbury.

The second child of Thomas and Maude Hornsby was born in 1904 and was named Thomas Hornsby Jr. In that era, a circus spent the winters at the Fairbury Fairgrounds. Like many other young boys, Thomas Hornsby Jr. dreamed of one day joining the circus.

In 1914, when Thomas Hornsby Jr. was ten years old, he began his circus career. Young Thomas was a member of a "perch act." In this act, Thomas sat on top of a pole while another circus member balanced the pole.

In 1920, the Hornsby family was living at 111 East Chestnut Street. Thomas Hornsby Jr. was 15 years old and was living with his seven siblings in this home. His father, Robert Hornsby Sr., was a house painter. Around this time, Thomas Hornsby Jr. moved from Fairbury to Streator.

In 1924, aerial performer Harold Rich appeared at the Fairbury Fair. Harold did not use a safety net. He started to teach Thomas Hornsby Jr. how to perform on the flying trapeze.

At the age of 22, Thomas Hornsby Jr. married Grace Irene Hart from Streator. She was 16 years old. They set up their home at 1122 South Otter Creek Street in Streator. They eventually had two boys and five girls. Son Wayne Thomas Hornsby died just four days after he was born.

The first published newspaper story about Thomas Hornsby Jr. appeared in 1934. Because he performed 50 feet in the air without a safety net, he used the stage name of Fearless Tommy Hornsby. His act was featured on the 4th of July in Streator. In August, he performed again at Starved Rock for the Republican Rally.

In 1935, Thomas Hornsby Sr. went with his son to Columbia City, Indiana. Fearless Tommy Hornsby performed before 25,000 people who were attending Old Settlers Day. This performance was dangerous because it was raining, and Tommy performed his act outdoors. Fearless Tommy performed his show safely that day.

Fearless Tommy had a bad accident in 1937 while performing for the carnival company Grove Shows in Kokomo, Indiana. Tommy finished his act and started to lower himself to the ground. Suddenly, the hook on the top bar snapped, causing him to plunge a distance of 40 feet. Fearless Tommy was rushed to a Kokomo hospital. He suffered no broken bones but was in the hospital for four days with bad cuts and bruises.

After this fall in 1937, Fearless Tommy continued to perform. He appeared at Starved Rock for the 4th of July celebration in 1938. In 1939, he again appeared at Starved Rock on the 4th of July. The last newspaper account of Fearless Tommy performing his aerial act was in Lansing, Michigan, in 1941. At some point, Tommy experienced a severe fall in which he never fully recovered his strength. Tommy had to give up his aerial act.



In 1941, the Thomas Hornsby Jr. family was still living in the same home in Streator. Thomas reported to the U.S. Census taker that he was a laborer and sixth grade was his highest education level.

In 1945, Thomas Hornsby Jr. started to design and build a miniature carnival at his home. Every night he would work on his model. In 1949, after four years of building his carnival, the Streator newspaper ran a feature story about his project. The article recounted that Thomas Hornsby Jr. had worked at various local foundries and machine shops.

Thomas recounted that a bad accident in 1939 caused him to stop his aerial career. Because he still loved the carnival, he decided to build a miniature carnival. Thomas planned to make this a portable display that he could display at various events. After four years of working on his project, Thomas had completed a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, a tilt-a-whirl ride, an electrical power truck, and several concession stands. His goal was to add a loop-o-plane, octopus, chair swings, and kiddies or automobile rides. Once fully completed, the miniature carnival would occupy a space that was 12 by 18 feet.

In 1950, Thomas Hornsby Jr. exhibited his miniature Carnival at Fairbury Fair. He then showed it again in 1951, and the Blade newspaper published a description of his unique project. Mr. Hornsby exhibited his miniature carnival at many local events. He also built a full-size merry-go-round that he set up at local events.

Thomas Hornsby Jr. died in 1976 at the age of 71 in Streator. His obituary reported that he was a retired truck driver from Melvin Trucking Co.

In 2020, a 16-minute video titled Fearless Tommy Hornsby, Streator, Illinois, was uploaded to YouTube. This video includes Fearless Tommy performing aerial acts in 1935 at Streator. It also has many photos of his miniature carnival and full-size merry-go-round.

Thomas Hornsby Jr. was one of a few boys who actually fulfilled their childhood dream of performing in the circus. After being unable to continue his career due to an accident, he continued his love of the carnival by building his unique miniature carnival.



Fearless Tommy Hornsby performed 50 feet  
in the air with no safety net.

## **CHAPTER 48**

### **Fairbury's Wealthiest Citizen**

It is estimated that Thomas A. Beach was worth \$50 million when he died in Fairbury in 1911. His home on East Hickory Street was refurbished and still stands today. This home is often called the Lion House because of the two stone lions in the front yard. The Beach family also built their own mausoleum in Graceland Cemetery.

The story of Thomas A. Beach began with his father, Dr. Lorenzo Beach. Dr. Beach was the son of Obil Beach and Elizabeth Kilbourne. He was born in New Haven, Vermont, in 1798. Dr. Beach and his brother Uri Beach moved to Worthington, Ohio, in 1813. Dr. Beach was 15 years old when he moved to Ohio, and he finished his education there. In 1817, Lorenzo Beach started the study of medicine. He completed his medical training at Urbana, Ohio, under the training of Drs. Carter and Mosgove. Dr. Lorenzo Beach began his practice in the Amity, Ohio, area. Dr. Beach made house calls to his patients within a 20-mile radius from his home.

By 1833, Dr. Beach had established himself as a leading merchant in the Darby Township area. He also invested in farmland and traded livestock. In 1853, farmland reached a new high price of \$35 per acre. Dr. Beach sold all of his Ohio farmland for \$30 to \$40 per acre.

Dr. Lorenzo Beach used the proceeds from selling his Ohio holdings to buy farmland in Illinois. He purchased 5,773 acres in 38 different real estate transactions in McLean, Livingston, and Kankakee counties. His purchases included 1,083 acres in the Fairbury area.

In 1850, Congress passed a law granting farmland to veterans of the War of 1812. Many of these veterans had no interest in moving to the swampy land in Central Illinois. These veterans sold their land grants on the secondary market for 30 cents an acre. This price was 12 cents on the dollar of the official federal government land price of \$2.50 per acre.

Dr. Lorenzo Beach purchased 720 acres using military veteran land patents for 30 cents per acre. He paid \$2.50 per acre to the federal government for

the other 5,053 acres he purchased. Dr. Beach invested a total of \$12,850 in Illinois farmland. This amount would be equivalent to \$362,149 in today's dollars. Dr. Beach moved to Fairbury and died at the age of 80 in 1878.

Thomas A. Beach, son of Dr. Lorenzo Beach, was born in Madison County, Ohio, in 1828. Thomas married Miss Amelia Bartlett in Ohio in 1852. The first child of Thomas and Amelia Beach was daughter Sarah Beach, born in Ohio in 1853. When Dr. Beach moved his family to Fairbury in 1854, his son, Thomas A. Beach, moved his family as well. Thomas was 26 years old when he moved to Fairbury.

In 1856, daughter Chloe Beach was born in Fairbury. The youngest child of Thomas and Amelia Beach was Ella Beach. She was born in 1862 in Fairbury.

Thomas Beach started his first business in 1865 in Fairbury. His firm was a mercantile business named Pogue & Beach. Two years later, the bank of Bartlett, Beach, and Downing was established in Fairbury.

In 1867, daughter Sarah Beach died at the age of ten. In 1872, Thomas A. Beach built a beautiful new home at 402 East Hickory Street. It was based on the Italianate style of architecture. It had two stone lions in the front yard of the house.

Death struck the Beach family again in 1875 when daughter Chloe Beach died at the age of 19 in Fairbury.

By 1878, Thomas A. Beach was a very wealthy man. Thomas owned 540 acres of farmland and owned other properties in Fairbury. His net worth was \$76,000 in 1878. If Mr. Beach earned a ten percent return on his 1878 net worth, he would have been worth \$50 million in today's dollars when he died in 1911.

Ella Beach, the only child of Thomas and Amelia Beach to live to adulthood, married Dr. George Lewis. One of the children of Dr. George Lewis and Ella Beach was Alma Eloise Lewis. She married Percy C. James, Jr. in Fairbury. Alma Lewis James became a Fairbury historian and wrote the Fairbury history book titled "Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars."

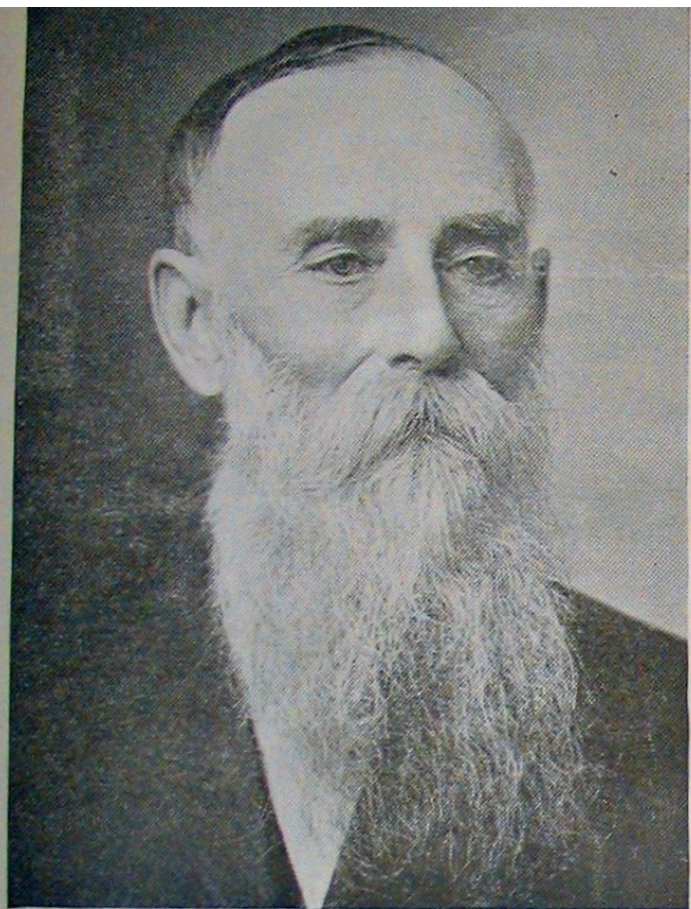
In the early 1980s, Jack Tollensdorf purchased the historic Beach house. He carefully restored the home to its original condition. Local firms that assisted in the restoration process were K Double Z Construction Co., Bob Nussbaum Plumbers, Virg's Carpet Shop, Stan's Cabinet Place, Livingston County Ready Mix, Hartzell Rigsby Electric, Hoffman Homes, and Dave's Nursery.

The first Open House displaying the renovated Beach house was conducted on June 27, 1982. Many curious Fairbury citizens attended the Open House to see what the beautiful old home looked like in its restored condition. One of the unique features of the mansion that has aroused passersby's curiosity for over 100 years is the stone lions on the front lawn.

The lions, imported from Europe and purchased by Thomas A. Beach at the World's Fair in California, were initially hollow. In 1970, they were filled with cement after an incident in which would-be thieves dragged one of the lions across the yard but could not lift it over the wrought iron fence. As part of the restoration process, the lions were restored by Fay Kyburz, owner/operator of Fay's Plastercraft in Fairbury.

The bank that Thomas A. Beach started underwent several changes in ownership after his death in 1911. In 1923, three Fairbury banks merged into one new bank. The bank started by Mr. Beach was merged with the Walton Bank into the Fairbury Bank. Today, this bank is owned by the Bank of Pontiac.

Besides family descendants, there are at least three distinct remaining remnants of the Thomas A. Beach family in Fairbury. The first is his renovated home at 402 East Hickory Street. The second remnant is the Beach Mausoleum at Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery. The third remnant is the Fairbury history book, "Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars," written by Alma Lewis James, Thomas A. Beach's granddaughter.



THOMAS A. BEACH

## **CHAPTER 49**

### **Judge McDowell One of Franklin Oliver's Lawyers**

The earliest settlers in Livingston County were Frederick Rook and Major Valentine Darnall in 1829. Rook settled west of Pontiac, and Major Darnall settled south of Fairbury. Three years later, in 1832, William McDowell and his family settled north of Fairbury on the South Fork of the Vermilion River. The McDowells established the town of Avoca at this location. One of William McDowell's sons, Woodford G. McDowell, was a lawyer and Judge.

One other early Livingston County settler was Franklin Benjamin Oliver (1797-1881). He was the son of John A. Oliver and Mary E. Carman in New Jersey. John Oliver served as a Quartermaster in the Revolutionary War and was a personal friend of Benjamin Franklin. Ben Franklin gave a portrait of himself to John Oliver. When John Oliver died in 1824, he gave the Ben Franklin portrait and his war documents to his son Franklin Oliver. When Franklin Oliver decided to head west from New Jersey, he took the Franklin portrait and the war papers with him. Franklin Oliver kept \$5,000 cash hidden in the back of the picture. Unfortunately, the Franklin portrait and all the war documents were destroyed in a house fire.

Family legend recounts that Franklin Oliver and his family were headed for California when he came to a grove of trees. This grove appealed to him as a campsite. He entered the timber and immediately found himself surrounded by Kickapoo. Oliver drove his knife into the nearest tree as a sign of peace, and the Kickapoos presently withdrew to their council fire to hold a pow-wow. Mrs. Oliver built a little fire of her own and cooked supper for her family. After they had eaten, the Kickapoo returned to take him to their chief. The chief offered Oliver their peace pipe. Oliver was not a smoker, but he always said this was one time when he was glad to indulge. The family lived in a teepee at first. Later the Kickapoo helped them build a log cabin. This site was three miles south of Chatsworth and became known as Oliver's Grove.

The Kickapoo were friendly, but they were still suspicious of Oliver because the Black Hawk War was brewing. Caution compelled Oliver to always stay in plain sight of the Kickapoo so they could easily watch him.

The McDowells and other early settlers around Avoca became very alarmed when the Black Hawk War started in 1832. The Kickapoo suggested that Oliver tell the Avoca settlers to go east to Indiana until the war was over. Oliver warned the other Avoca group, and they briefly traveled to Indiana until the four-month-long war was over.

Oliver did not go east with the other settlers. He stayed at Oliver's Grove with the Kickapoo during the war. Oliver was allowed to come and go as he pleased. The Kickapoo chief grew so fond of him that he named his son for him. Later, Oliver gave the chief's name to the village of Saunemin.

After the Black Hawk War ended in 1832, the Kickapoo were forced to leave their home in Oliver's Grove and moved out of Illinois. Since Oliver was a civil engineer and surveyor by profession, he received the job of surveying most of Livingston County for the first time. As he found land that he liked, he bought it. He acquired over four thousand acres. Franklin Oliver was one of the great landowners of early Illinois.

Almost as soon as the Franklin Oliver family settled in Oliver's Grove, the rumors and stories about Oliver being a sinister character began. When the mail routes were established, his home became the post office. As settlers became more numerous, his house also became an inn offering shelter to travelers. The men that lodged at Oliver's home slept on their guns because the place had such a bad reputation. There was rumored to be an enormous pile of iron wheel rims hidden in the grove from the burning of many immigrant wagons. The owners of these wagons were never seen again. The tales of Oliver's robberies and murders were endless.

His very appearance supported the legends about him. His hair was white now, and since he wore it shoulder length, it had a breath-stopping, eerie look when blown by the wind. Fairbury children were in terror of his very name. The children were afraid because as each one of Oliver's children was born, he took his pocket knife and notched their ears, identifying them, like his animals, as his own.

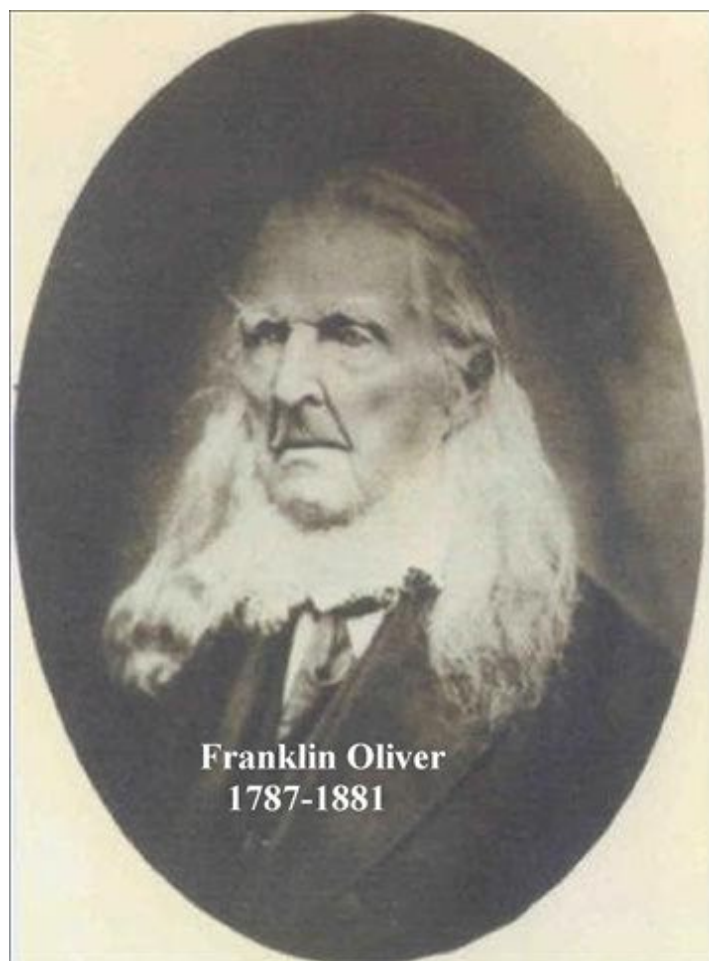


Pioneers were warned not to stop at Oliver's Grove but to keep on going until they got to Billy Fugate's in Fairbury. Mrs. Fugate baked bread for them. She also gave them milk and eggs. The pioneers had an opportunity to rest in safety at the Fugate farm.

Franklin Oliver needed the services of lawyers because he was always involved in lawsuits and divorces. In her book *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*, Alma Lewis James recounted that the first two wives of Franklin Oliver died. His third wife filed for divorce and was granted four hundred acres of his land. Oliver was so infuriated by the divorce settlement that he deeded his remaining farmland to Judge McDowell of Fairbury and Judge Payson of Pontiac. He thought this would prevent future wives from receiving any of his precious lands.

Franklin Oliver made national news in 1881 when he was 84 years old. The newspapers exaggerated his age to be 94. The newspapers reported that 94-year-old Franklin Oliver proposed marriage to a 30-year-old Saybrook woman. He also offered her 1,000 acres if she would marry him. She accepted his marriage proposal until she learned that his children held all his land as conservators. Once she realized she legally could not get the promised farmland, she called off the wedding.

Franklin Oliver was undoubtedly the most colorful early settler of Livingston County. A new book is currently being researched and written by citizens of Chatsworth. When this book is completed, it will be a fascinating tale of Franklin Oliver and his descendants' lives.



**Franklin Oliver**  
**1787-1881**

## **CHAPTER 50**

### **Ford & Harrington Horse Importing Firm**

Before the introduction of farm tractors in the 1920s, every farmer needed strong and powerful horses to plow and plant his fields. In every agricultural area, men established horse-trading businesses to provide farmers with the animals they needed. Often, large draft horses were imported from Europe and sold to Fairbury area farmers.

Fairbury had two primary horse dealers. The first was John Virgin (1838-1900). John was a Civil War veteran who settled in Fairbury after the war. He imported Percheron draft horses from France and then sold them to Fairbury area farmers. He designed and built the unique "Horse Palace" stable, which was just north of Walton's Department Store. John was well known nationally and was President of the National French Draft Horse Association. The Governor of Illinois appointed him to set up the agricultural exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. In today's dollars, John Virgin sold about \$1 million worth of Percheron horses annually.

The second primary horse dealer in Fairbury was the firm of Ford & Harrington. At their peak, they sold 400 to 500 horses annually at an average price of \$2,000. In today's dollars, the annual sales of Ford & Harrington were \$25.9 million.

James E. Harrington was born in 1829 near the city of Westport in County Mayo, Ireland. In that era, potatoes were the primary food crop grown in Ireland. In 1845, a blight disease wiped out all the potato crops.

James E. Harrington, at the age of 20, decided to escape from the famine and emigrate to America. His ocean voyage in 1849 from Ireland to Mobile, Alabama, took eight weeks. After reaching Mobile, he left by riverboat for Cincinnati, Ohio. James worked in Ohio as a farmhand for eight years. In 1853, James Harrington married Bridget McGreal. They left Ohio in a covered wagon and traveled for 17 days until they reached what is now Fairbury. They made their covered wagon trip just a couple of months before the new Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. James and his brother Edward Harrington

farmed land they rented southwest of Fairbury. In 1860, James Harrington purchased a 40-acre farm in Indian Grove Township. In 1888, James Harrington retired from farming and moved to Fairbury. James and Bridget Harrington had six children.

One of the sons of James and Bridget Harrington was Austin Harrington (1865-1949). Austin was born on a farm southeast of Fairbury. He attended the Beulah country school near his farm. Austin farmed until about 1898, when he moved to a new house he had built in Fairbury. Austin joined the draft horse importing firm of O'Brien & Harrington. In 1905, Austin married Miss Minnie Gerisch of Chenoa.

Frank Ford was born in Somersetshire, England, in 1850. He was the son of William H. Ford and Harriett Norman. William H. Ford, who lived and died in his native land, was a farmer and a breeder of draft horses and was an excellent judge of Shires, the draft horses of England.

Frank Ford first saw the light of day on his father's farm. His boyhood and youth were spent in school and his father's barns and fields. Under his father's instruction, Frank became one of the best judges of horses in all that region. In 1868, when eighteen years old, he came to Ravenswood, Canada, where he gave his attention to farming. In 1870 he came to Odell, Livingston County, and engaged with Therin Wooley, breeders of draft horses, and was connected with their business until 1872.

May 20, 1873, Frank married Miss Lucy Richardson, born in Flintshire, England, in 1845. About the time of his marriage, he bought forty acres of farmland near Odell. In 1878 rented 320 acres in that vicinity, on which he began breeding and raising Percheron and Shire horses.

Frank remained in that location until 1881. He had so much success that he bought 160 acres in the southeast quarter of Odell Township. On that site, Frank erected fine barns and other buildings for the breeding and care of horses. He purchased the finest Percherons, Belgians, and Shires, both stallions and mares, buying from such importers as James D. Beckett, of Chicago; D. H. Vandolah, of Lexington, Ill.; the Dillon Brothers, of Normal, Ill.; and Dunham, Coleman & Fletcher, of Wayne, Ill.

In 1893, Mr. Ford left the farm and moved to Fairbury to begin his labors there as a buyer for the firm of O'Brien & Devine. This firm was a dealer in big draft horses, which they shipped to the largest horse markets in the United States and England. His connection as buyer and salesman with this concern terminated in 1897, when Mr. John F. O'Brien died. Mr. O'Brien was married to Mary F. Harrington, a sister of Austin Harrington.

After the death of Mr. O'Brien, Frank Ford formed a partnership with Austin Harrington under the firm name of Ford & Harrington. They continued buying and selling market horses and sold for the largest importers of Percheron, Belgian, Shires, and Hackneys horses. In 1906, Ford & Harrington began importing horses, stallions, and mares directly from European breeders. In 1907, the firm expanded by opening horse barns in Parker, South Dakota, and Pueblo, Colorado. The South Dakota barn was managed by George A. Ford, a son of Frank Ford.

Ford & Harrington developed a national reputation as importers of high-quality European horses. By 1909, they were selling 400 to 500 horses annually at a price range from \$500 to \$3,500 per horse. The firm began issuing annual catalogs with horses for sale. They hired the famous artist Lou Burk to draw illustrations of each horse offered for sale in the catalog.

The advent of the farm tractor and the automobile was the death knell of the horse importing business. All that remains today of this hugely successful horse importing firm is one of their advertising calendars and one of their annual catalogs with Mr. Burk's beautiful illustrations of the horses they sold.



# FORD & HARRINGTON

Importers of Percheron, Belgian, Shire  
and Hackney Stallions and Mares

FAIRBURY, - - - ILLINOIS

BRANCH BARN  
**Parker, S. D.**  
The First and Only  
Importing Barn in  
South Dakota

1908 JANUARY 1908						
Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
JAN. 1st MO.						

BRANCH BARN

**Pueblo, Col.**

Ford & Harrington 1908 Calendar

## **CHAPTER 51**

### **Early Businessman and Opera House Manager J. E. Eddy**

John Edward Eddy played an essential role in early Fairbury history. His story began with his father, Stephen Eddy, born in Orcieres, Switzerland, in 1821. At the age of 28, Stephen decided to emigrate from Switzerland to America in 1849. The ocean voyage across the Atlantic took 22 days to reach New York City. After getting to America, he went to Wisconsin and worked for two months without pay. He then traveled to Chicago and walked to Ottawa. In 1856, Stephen married Mary Lucile Tritley. Around 1958, Stephen and Mary Eddy moved to a farm southeast of Fairbury. Stephen and Mary Eddy had seven children. In 1890, at the age of 69, Stephen Eddy retired from farming and moved into Fairbury. He lived to be 83 years old and was buried in Saint Johns Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.

James E. Harrington was born in 1829 near the city of Westport in County Mayo, Ireland. In that era, potatoes were the primary food crop grown in Ireland. In 1845, a blight disease wiped out all the potato crops. This led to four years of mass starvation, where over one million people died. Another one million people emigrated to other countries to escape famine and disease. The population of Ireland fell by 25 percent. Americans refer to this event as the Irish Potato Famine.

James E. Harrington, at the age of 20, decided to escape from the famine and emigrate to America. His ocean voyage in 1849 from Ireland to Mobile, Alabama, took eight weeks. After reaching Mobile, he left by riverboat for Cincinnati, Ohio. When he arrived at Cincinnati, he discovered that 8,000 people had died from a cholera epidemic. James secured employment as a farmhand 16 miles away from the city to escape the cholera outbreak.

James was paid \$72 for his first year working as a farmhand. He sent \$60 of his pay to his widowed mother in Ireland. James worked eight more years as a farmhand in Ohio. He worked for three different farmers, and

his salary ranged from \$6 to \$15 a month. James continued to send money to his mother in Ireland and saved some money to buy his own farm.

In 1853, James Harrington married Bridget McGreal. They left Ohio in a covered wagon and traveled for 17 days until they reached what is now Fairbury. They made their covered wagon trip just a couple of months before the new Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. James and his brother Edward Harrington farmed land they rented southwest of Fairbury. In 1860, James Harrington purchased a 40-acre farm in Indian Grove Township.

James and Bridget Harrington built a house on the 40-acre farm. The walls of this new house were plastered the same day Abraham Lincoln was elected, November 6, 1860. James bought more farmland in 1871 in Yates Township. In 1888, James Harrington retired from farming and moved to Fairbury. James and Bridget Harrington had six children. James Harrington died in 1911 at the age of 82. James was buried in Saint Johns Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.

The Eddy family and the Harrington family became connected through marriage in 1894. John Edward Eddy was the 25-year-old son of Stephen and Mary Eddy. Miss Bridget Ellen "Nellie" Harrington was the 20-year-old daughter of James and Bridget Harrington. The marriage of J.E. Eddy and Nellie Harrington connected two of the oldest families in Fairbury. John and Nellie Eddy had two children in Fairbury. Marie Irene Eddy was born in 1895, and Willard J. Eddy was born in 1901.

J.E. Eddy initially was in the hardware, plumbing, and tinning business. From 1891 until 1902, T.G. Henderson was his business partner. Eventually, Mr. Eddy bought out his partner and purchased a building at the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets from Thomas A. Beach. Several old photographs still exist illustrating J.E. Eddy's hardware store at that corner.

In 1917, Mr. Eddy bought the old Opera House next door from Phil Wade. This building was located where Steidinger Meats is now located. It was a three-story building that was called several different names. It was dedicated in 1871 and was initially called the Fairbury Hall. Initially,



many prominent “free thinker” guest speakers spoke from the stage at the north end of the second floor. A regular meeting was held every Sunday.

Mr. Eddy renamed the Opera House to Eddy's Hall. In the era, Eddy's Hall was a primary source of entertainment in Fairbury. The upstairs was used for roller-skating, parties, and dances. The upper floor was also used as a basketball court for the enormously popular Bon Ton Limits men's basketball team. The basketball team was sponsored by the Bon Ton drug store in Fairbury. Some of the most well-known basketball players included John Joda and Carl Goudy.

In March of 1920, brothers Oscar and Walter Nussbaum bought out the plumbing business from J. E. Eddy. They named their new company Nussbaum Bros. and that firm lasted for over 50 years in Fairbury. After selling his plumbing business, Mr. Eddy retained ownership of Eddy's Hall.

By 1935, J.E. Eddy was 67 years old and had been a Fairbury businessman for more than 40 years. While working at Eddy's Hall, he suffered a stroke. Friends took Mr. Eddy to his home at 300 East Maple Street, where he passed away. Mr. Eddy was buried in Saint Johns Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.

J.E. Eddy was a very well-known Fairbury businessman. He provided a hardware store and plumbing services for many years. Mr. Eddy provided entertainment to Fairbury citizens at Eddy's Hall. His funeral was one of the largest ever conducted in Fairbury. All Fairbury businesses closed during the funeral services.



## **J. E. EDDY & CO.**

### **Hardware Specialties**

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**Protect your Buildings by  
using Copper Cable or Spiral  
Lightning Rods, put on and  
guaranteed by us. No building  
too large or too small. We  
can save you money.**

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**Phones { Store . 296  
Residence 207**

**FAIRBURY, ILLINOIS**

J. E. Eddy Business Card



J. E. Eddy (1863-1935)  
Fairbury Businessman and Opera House Manager

Main Street Looking West from 5th



MAIN ST. LOOKING WEST, FAIRBURY, ILL.

## **CHAPTER 52**

### **Cropsey Played an Important Role in the World War II Effort**

For the United States, World War II started in 1941 with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This war ended just under four years later when Japan surrendered to the United States.

Many historians contend the primary reason the United States won this war was the nation's ability to produce more goods than any nation in history. These goods included military equipment for the United States and its allied countries. These goods also included all the agricultural products produced by American farmers. During the war, American farmers grew enough food to feed the United States and many allied populations.

The Gibson City Canning Factory dates back to at least 1903. In that year, that factory installed a new 100 horse-power engine to replace a thirty-horse-power engine. This new engine operated a dynamo that provided electricity for the plant. In 1907, a major remodel of the factory was done. The length of the husking sheds was increased by seventy-five feet. New dumps were constructed to provide for unloading the sweet corn brought in by farmers. The new dumps eliminated the farmers from scooping the sweet corn from their wagons to the factory.

This factory canned hominy in the early nineteen hundreds. It also canned sweet corn, dried beans, and green peas. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the factory canned beef for the government.

In 1936, the factory decided to run an experiment and develop a system for growing and canning peas. One hundred acres of peas were planted on farms near Gibson City. The peas were planted on twenty plots of just five acres each. Once the harvest season started, the factory operated day and night until the harvest was over.

This experiment was a success, so in 1937, the pea farm acreage was increased from 100 to 800 acres. Each plot was on ten acres of land. The

canning factory hired nineteen people to be hullers to work at strategic locations to separate the peas from the vines. In addition to the 800 acres of peas canned that year, 5,000 acres of sweet corn were also canned. This second year of canning peas was a success, and the factory began canning peas each year after this experiment.

Farmers learned that growing peas was much more labor-intensive than growing soybeans. Once the peas reached the harvest stage, farmers cut the vines with horse-drawn mowers. The vines had to be manually raked into rows, so the subsequent horse-drawn hayrack would not crush them. Farm laborers had to manually use pitchforks to move the vines from the rows on the ground onto a hay wagon. The hay wagon would take them to a central area where hullers separated the peas from the vines. The peas were then canned in the factory.

Farmers were exempt from being drafted into World War II. Hired farm laborers either enlisted or were drafted into the military. Those few non-farmers who were not serving in the military migrated to the high-paying jobs in war factories in Illinois. As a result, labor for farm work was very scarce. Growing peas was not as profitable as growing soybeans unless the government offered a higher price for the peas.

For the 1942 growing season, the government decided that the Gibson City canning factory should double its average pea production from 750 acres to 1,500 acres. The government instructed the plant to stop producing its winter packaging of pork and beans. The stoppage of pork and beans packaging would conserve the limited supplies of tin cans for the more essential and high vitamin pea crop.

The canning factory purchased several new viner machines, power units, field boxes, and additional factory equipment to handle the enlarged pea acreage. To entice farmers to sign up and grow peas, the government increased the price from \$49 to \$70 per acre.

To help alleviate the farmer's concerns about labor shortages, a well-coordinated farm labor placement program was announced by the state director of agriculture. Farm bureaus, the extension service, and county war boards all cooperated in establishing labor supply offices throughout the country.

Cropsey farmer Arthur Huston (1902-1979) decided to help the war effort and grow peas in 1942. Because it was rather unusual to grow peas in Central Illinois and it was helping the war effort, the Pantagraph published a story about Mr. Huston's pea farming. A Pantagraph photographer took three black and white photos of the pea harvest on Arthur's farm.

When photographic negatives were used to print newspapers, the quality of the photo degraded when it was printed on newsprint. Then many years later, the paper newspapers were scanned and converted to microfilm. This step also degraded the quality of the original photograph. In the last decade or so, the Blade and Pantagraph microfilm was converted to digital files. The quality of any of the digital files of pictures printed today from these newspapers is inferior compared to the original photograph.

In 2020, the McLean County Museum of History announced a new project. In this new project, the museum will digitize old photographic negatives donated by the Pantagraph. The first batch of computerized old Pantagraph photos was released in 2020. This first batch included three black and white images of pea harvesting on the Arthur Huston farm in Cropsey.

Two of these pea harvesting black and white 1942 photographs were colorized using a free website. One of these two colorized images accompanies this article. As additional old Pantagraph photos are converted to computer images, it will help us better appreciate other aspects of Fairbury's exciting history.





Cropsey farmer Arthur Huston harvesting peas in June of 1942.



Other farmers helping to harvest peas.



## **CHAPTER 53**

### **The G.A.R. Was One of Fairbury's First Social Clubs**

Just four years after Fairbury was founded in 1857, the Civil War began. Approximately 301 Fairbury men served in the Civil War. These men represented about 41% of the male population in the Fairbury area. During the war, Fairbury was so deserted that most of Main Street was farmed as a wheat field.

The Civil War ended in April of 1865 when General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse. The Fairbury area soldiers returned home as soon as the war ended. Many other Civil War veterans from other cities and states moved to Fairbury after the Civil War.

In 1866, the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) was created by Benjamin F. Stephenson in Decatur, Illinois. The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army (United States Army), Union Navy (U.S. Navy), Marines, and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service who served in the American Civil War for the Northern Federal forces.

The G.A.R. grew to include hundreds of local community posts across the nation. These posts were predominately in the North, but there were also a few in the South and West. Linking men through their war experience, the G.A.R. became among the first organized advocacy groups in American politics. This group supported voting rights for black veterans, promoted patriotic education, helped to make Memorial Day a national holiday, lobbied the United States Congress to establish regular veterans' pensions, and supported Republican political candidates. At more than 490,000, its peak membership was in 1890, a high point of various Civil War commemorative and monument dedication ceremonies.

The G.A.R.'s political power grew during the latter part of the 19th century, and it helped elect several United States presidents. The first

president they helped to elect was Ulysses S. Grant. They then helped elect Rutherford B. Hayes, James A. Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley. For a time, candidates could not get a Republican presidential or congressional nomination without the endorsement of the G.A.R. veterans voting block.

Fairbury had a very active G.A.R. post. The Illinois G.A.R. held annual meetings, called encampments, in Chicago. Each year members of the Fairbury Post 75 sent representatives to the State of Illinois G.A.R. encampments between 1880 and 1885.

The Fairbury men who were very active in the G.A.R. were John Virgin, J. F. Earnhart, James Armstrong, Isaiah Conn, D. L. Murdock, H. H. Stafford, A. H. Mundt, B. E. Robinson, J. Zimmerman, and D. W. Hilsabeck.

At one of the annual encampment meetings, Mr. Augustus H. Mundt of Fairbury reported that he helped establish new G.A.R. posts at Chenoa, Weston, Cornell, Piper City, and Chatsworth in 1883.

In 1902, the land between the old City Hall and the Post Office was sunken three feet and contained Von Tobel's unsightly lumber yard. Local citizens wanted to remove the lumber yard, fill the recessed area with dirt, and make it into a park. Von Tobel sold his lumberyard, and his buildings were removed. Local citizens tried to fill the recessed area using sand from the Munz sandpit. Using sand proved to be too difficult. The TP&W railroad offered to bring in fill dirt on flat cars if the local citizens would unload the earth. Local volunteers unloaded the flat cars and filled in the depressed area with soil.

Volunteers used ice cream socials and other fund-raising events to buy furnishings and a fountain for the park. Fairbury's G.A.R. Post 75 donated and installed two cannons in the park. The August 15, 1902, Blade reported that Joe Paternoster had completed two cement mountings for the cannons. The cement mountings had an artistic appearance. The cannons were mounted to their concrete supports, and a dedication ceremony was held. The cannons are 62 inches long, 14 inches across, and weigh 1,300 to 1,400 pounds each.

Augustus H. Mundt was a watchmaker and jeweler in Fairbury. He was born in 1847 in Bremen, Germany. At the age of fourteen, he came to Peoria, Illinois, to visit relatives. At the age of sixteen, he enlisted in the 11th Illinois Cavalry. He fought for the Union Army at the battles of Vicksburg, Shiloh, the Black River Expedition, Jackson, Yazoo City, and Pine Bluff. In late 1864, he was wounded three times. He was injured in the left lung, left shoulder, and left knee. Mundt was then taken prisoner in January of 1865. He remained in prison until the war ended in April of 1865.

Returning to Peoria after the war ended, Augustus married Miss Annie M. Story and moved to Fairbury in 1868. In November of 1869, he started his watchmaking and jewelry business in Fairbury. Mr. Mundt was very active in Post 75 of the Fairbury G.A.R. Mr. Mundt had many hobbies while living in Fairbury. These hobbies included collecting butterflies and insects from around the world. He also had collections of seashells, minerals, fossils, war relics, stuffed birds, odd and rare watches, and idols. The Smithsonian Museum sought one of the idols in his collection. His collection of Indian relics was valued at over \$10,000 in 1936. This amount would be equivalent to \$190,000 in today's dollars.

A.H. Mundt died in 1936 at the age of 87 in Fairbury. He was buried in Fairbury's Graceland cemetery. He was the last surviving Fairbury veteran of the Civil War. The national G.A.R. organization was dissolved in 1956 at the death of its last member, Albert Woolson (1850 -1956) of Duluth, Minnesota.

In 1999, the two cannons in Central Park were removed when an inoperative fountain was replaced with a gazebo. The cannons were placed in storage. In 2005, the Arrowhead Lodge of Fairbury received city approval to re-install the two cannons in the park. Volunteers installed new concrete foundations to support the two guns. The park was later renamed Veterans Memorial Park. These two cannons are the sole remaining reminder of the Fairbury Post 75 of the G.A.R.



One of the two cannons donated by the G.A.R. in 1902

## **CHAPTER 54**

### **Life as a Kid in 1965**

The 1960s were an excellent time to grow up as a kid in Fairbury. In that era, most small towns struggled with accommodating the largest generational group in U.S. history, the Baby Boomers.

So many children were entering the Fairbury school system that the local schools ran out of kindergarten classroom space. Many Fairbury children attended kindergarten in local churches because there was not enough classroom space.

To start the 1960s, the North Side children attended Isaac Walton grade school. The South Siders attended Edison grade school. One of the most favorite memories of attending grade school in these two aging buildings was going down the exterior fire escape for fire drills.

The Fairbury School Board was faced with surging enrollment and two old buildings that had outlived their useful lives. So the Board decided to shut down both old grade schools and send the children to the new Westview School on south First Street.

On the last day of school before the summer break, grade school classes would pack a sack lunch and walk to Marsh Park. It was the only park in Fairbury with playground equipment at that time.

Once school was out for the summer months, many children spent their time at the Fairbury swimming pool. The first swimming pool was built in 1958. In 1965 it was only seven years old. The Red Cross sponsored swimming lessons for the youth of Fairbury. This first swimming pool had a gravel parking lot, and the vending machines were in a lean-to building on the west side of the pool.

The field for little league baseball was located in the southeast corner of the fairgrounds. Teams were named after local businesses, including Walton's and the Tastee-Freeze. There was a concession stand by the old baseball field. After Westview was built, the baseball field was moved

from the fairgrounds to the new school. After games played at the Westview field, the players would walk north a few blocks to get a cold treat at the Tasty-Freeze. A Cherry Coke was 10 cents plus five cents for the cherry flavoring.

During the summer months, farm kids would help out on their farm and their neighbors' farms. For example, they would walk the bean fields and pull any weeds. Kids would also help bale hay in the fields and then load and stack it in the barn. In addition, farm kids and some city kids would de-tassel corn in local areas.

In 1965, there were only three grocery stores in Fairbury. These were Dave's Supermarket, IGA, and Simmie's. Fairbury children's parents often instructed them not to cross the "Hard Road," or Route 24, because all the traffic made it dangerous to cross.

From a child's perspective, there were many significant buildings and stores on Locust Street. The most colorful building was the Honegger corporate office building with its distinctive red and white company colors. The new Fairbury City Hall now occupies this location.

There were two Laundromats in Fairbury in those times. One of them was located at the southwest corner of First and Locust Streets. Miniature boxes of Tide laundry detergent were sold in the Laundromat vending machines. The other Laundromat was owned by the Zimmerman's at the northeast corner of Second and Locust Streets.

If you were a young man fascinated by tools, the two best hardware stores in Fairbury were Zimmerman's and the tool department in Walton's. Many children found it challenging to wrap their Christmas gifts. If you bought your gift at Walton's, these amazing ladies would super efficiently wrap your item for you right before your eyes.

A favorite store of many children was Ben Franklin's five and ten cent store. They carried a large inventory of games and crafts for children. These included balsa airplanes, model kits, puzzles, and sports accessories.

Another iconic store was the Grey Goose run by Royce and Aldine Carter. There was no rural Pantagraph delivery on Sundays, so farm families

would stop at this store to get the Sunday paper. Families would often send the kids into the Grey Goose to get the newspaper, and each child was given 10 cents to buy some candy in that store.

Some parents would take their children to the bank to start a savings account. The bank always had some free candy for the children visiting the bank.

Next to the bank was the Fairbury Paint Store. They carried every imaginable type of painting accessories and wallpaper. Jack Tollensdorf kept some free candy for the kids in the old cabinet left from the previous Bon Ton Limits drug store.

Central Park, now Veterans Memorial Park, had a brick water fountain. Some mischievous Fairbury youths would dump some of those little Tide boxes from the Laundromat vending machine into the fountain. Many times that fountain made mountains of bubbles in that park.

One of the Fairbury barbers who cut children's hair was Bert Moulton. His shop was across the street from Sunken Park. He kept a good stock of comic books for the kids to read while waiting for their haircut. Debbie Kaye's Salon now occupies this building.

At the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets was the Loyola Theater. Many children watched Saturday matinee movies at this theater.

The Fairbury Fair brought a close to the summer for Fairbury children. The round concrete water fountain donated by C. B. Day had water fountains at just the right height for children to get a drink on a hot summer day. At the stock car races, the Boy Scouts would sell popcorn and soft drinks as a fundraiser.

Shortly after school started, there were hayrack rides in the autumn months. Besides school activities, there were not many outdoor events in the winter months. Many children went sledding on Shaft Hill next to the railroad tracks by Ninth Street. Some children ice skated on the Munz sandpit, Indian Creek, or on the Vermilion River.

Fairbury kids managed to have fun in the 1960s without cell phones, cable TV, or the Internet. Fairbury was a great small town to grow up in that era.



Water fountain in Central Park in 1965



## **CHAPTER 55**

### **The Dominy Homes**

The Dominy family was one of the most influential families in early Fairbury. The story of this family began with Lorenzo Beach Dominy being born in 1844 in Ohio. He was the son of Ezra Dominy and Hester A. Beach. When Lorenzo was just 16 months old, his father died of typhoid fever at the age of 25. Only four days after his father died, his mother also died of typhoid fever at the age of 20.

Infant Lorenzo Beach Dominy was raised by his maternal grandfather, Dr. Lorenzo Beach. Dr. Beach was born in New Haven, Vermont, and attended local schools. When Dr. Beach was 15 years old, he went with his older brother Uri Beach and settled in Ohio. He studied medicine with Dr. Carter of Urbana, Ohio, and started his medical practice in Ohio.

In that era, doctors had to travel by horseback to see their patients. Dr. Beach found his income was limited because of the excessive travel times. In about 1833, Dr. Beach switched careers and became a leading merchant in Darby County, Ohio. He became one of the largest landowners in that area. In 1853, when land values rose to \$35 per acre, Dr. Beach sold out and moved to Fairbury.

Congress passed a law that granted farmland to military veterans of the War of 1812. Most of these veterans did not want to move to swampy Fairbury, so they sold their land patents for about 30 cents an acre. In the 1850s, land could be also be purchased from the federal government for \$2.50 per acre. Dr. Beach purchased several thousand acres in the 1850s in Livingston County using a combination of land patents and cash.

Lorenzo B. Dominy started out farming in the Fairbury area. He married Phoebe Ann Curl in 1864 in Fairbury. In 1870, when Lorenzo B. Dominy was 26 years old, he began his business career with Thomas A. Beach as a hardware merchant. Thomas A. Beach was a Fairbury businessman and banker. He built the "Lion House" on east Hickory Street that has two concrete lions in the front yard. Thomas A. Beach was the wealthiest citizen of Fairbury, with a net worth of over \$50 million in today's dollars.

After being in the hardware business for three years, L. B. Dominy sold this business. He then helped found the banking company of Bartlett, Beach, and Dominy. Cicero Comstock Bartlett was the brother of the wife of Thomas A. Beach. In 1877, C. C. Bartlett withdrew from the bank due to poor health. In 1893, Thomas A. Beach retired. Lorenzo B. Dominy continued the bank. In 1901, Lorenzo added his son-in-laws Grant Yates McDowell and William R. Bane (1863-1917) to the bank.

Lorenzo and Phoebe Dominy had five children. Their only son, Charles L. Dominy, died at seven months of age. Their four daughters were Jenny Curl Dominy, Jesse Beach Dominy, Lizzie Hester Dominy, and Hazel Dominy. Jenny and Jesse Dominy were twin sisters.

According to the Blade, L. B. Dominy built a new house, and it was almost completed in June of 1882. Then about three years later, in December of 1885, the Blade reported that L. B. Dominy was now residing in his new palatial residence. Unfortunately, there are no known records that document the street addresses of these two homes. Census data indicates the 1885 new house is the one where L. B. Dominy lived many years at the northwest corner of Third Street and Route 24. The other 1882 new home could have been just west of this home at 108 West Oak Street.

Lorenzo B. Dominy died in 1902. In the 1930 Census, Mrs. Dominy's daughter Jennie McDowell and her family had moved into her house. Phoebe Dominy died in 1932.

The first daughter to marry was Lizzie Dominy. In 1889, she married William R. Bane in Fairbury. In the 1910 U.S. Census, William and Lizzie Bane lived at 108 West Oak Street, next door to her parents. William Bane died in 1917, and Lizzie Bane passed away in 1955. Eventually, the house was torn down and became a parking lot for Paternoster Ford. In recent years, Paternoster Ford was torn down, and today this site is occupied by the Family Dollar Store.

The second daughter to marry was Jenny Curl Dominy in 1890. She married Grant Yates McDowell. In both the 1900 and 1910 U.S. Census, they were living on Elm Street. In the 1920 Census, they were living at

203 West Elm Street. The large house they lived in was eventually torn down, and today it is a brick condominium complex.

L. B. Dominy died in 1902. By 1930, his widow, Phoebe Dominy, was 86 years old. Sometime between 1920 and 1930, G. Y. McDowell and his family moved in with Phoebe at her home at 310 South Third Street. Phoebe McDowell died in 1932 at the age of 88. Jenny McDowell died in 1947, and G. Y. McDowell died in 1955. The home then underwent a significant restoration by Betty Nussbaum. This house is currently known as the Hoffman House.

The third daughter to marry was Jesse Beach Dominy. In 1893, she married Herbert Powell. Mr. Powell was also a Fairbury banker. They initially lived in a house that Herbert owned at the southwest corner of Third Street and Route 24. In May of 1900, the Blade reported that Mr. Powell moved his old house to other lots he owned on Chestnut Street. Mr. Powell then built a beautiful new home at 401 South Third Street. Herbert Powell died in 1940.

The large Powell home was eventually converted to the Mowry Funeral Home. It underwent subsequent conversions to the Newland Funeral Home and the Stiver Funeral Home in 1962. After Stiver's built a new funeral home on North First Street, the old Powell home was torn down, and a brick apartment building was constructed on that site.

In 1904, Mrs. L. B. Dominy announced she would build what is now the Dominy Memorial Library. She created it in honor of her deceased husband and her daughter Hazel Dominy that died at age 17. The Hoffman House and the Dominy Memorial Library are two reminders of the Dominy family's significant contributions to Fairbury.



The Hoffman House is the last surviving Dominy house in Fairbury

## **CHAPTER 56**

### **Early Introduction of Automobiles into Fairbury Life**

The story of automobiles being introduced in Fairbury started with William Jennings Bethard (1858-1937). Several different sources indicate that he was the first person in Livingston County to purchase an automobile. Unfortunately, the year of the purchase and the model are unknown. The June 1901 Blade recounted that H. J. Ramsey bought a new Stanhope and now travels back and forth between his store and house in grand style. This information indicates Bethard purchased his automobile sometime before 1901.

W. J. Bethard was a prominent businessman in Fairbury. He operated a department store on the east end of Fairbury that competed with Walton's Bros. store. The Blade published an article recounting the July 4, 1904 parade. There were three automobiles in that parade. T. S. O. McDowell owned the first car. Mr. McDowell was dressed as Uncle Sam, and Miss Westervelt was dressed to represent Columbia. Chester Claudon owned the second automobile. In that second car, Chester Claudon, P. J. Hawk, and Palmer Westervelt were dressed to represent the Army. W. J. Bethard drove the last automobile. In the third car, W. J. Bethard's son Fred and Charles Swarm were dressed to represent the Navy.

Initially, there were hundreds of automobile manufacturers in the United States. The early cars were costly. Because of their high cost, the first owners of automobiles were usually doctors or wealthy businessmen. The doctors were eager to replace their horses and buggies with a car to make their house calls to patients. A typical 1907 automobile had a price of about \$850. This price would be equivalent to about \$23,611 in today's dollars. By 1925, Henry Ford's Model T reduced the price to \$300, or about \$4,450 in today's dollars.

Early automobiles were powered by steam, battery power, or gasoline internal combustion engines. It took a few years before the industry settled on using only gasoline-powered engines.

A book titled *List of Automobile Licenses Issued* by James A. Rose, Secretary of the State of Illinois, lists all license plates issued to Illinois residents in 1907, 1908, and 1909. This book recounts that only 10 Fairbury residents owned an automobile in 1907.

T. S. O. McDowell was issued license plate number 184 for his automobile manufactured by the White Company. This vehicle was steam-powered and sold for \$3,500, or \$97,221 in today's dollars. The average working annual salary was \$542, so it would take the average worker 6.5 years to pay for this car. T. S. O. McDowell (1858-1911) was a wealthy Fairbury banker and businessman.

J. W. Walton was the brother of Isaac Walton. They owned and operated the Walton Bros. department store in Fairbury for many years. His license plate number 420 was for a 1907 Stevens-Duryea automobile. This auto manufacturer offered three models in 1907, and they were all gasoline-powered. The runabout was \$2,400, the limousine was \$3,300, and the seven-seater with a massive six-cylinder engine was \$5,000. The seven-seater, with its tulipwood body, would cost \$139,00 in today's dollars.

Dr. Samuel Mathers Barnes (1846-1928) practiced medicine in Fairbury for many years. He was a physician of unusual skill and success and, for a long time, was the surgeon for the T.P. & W. Railroad. In addition, he was the Mayor of Fairbury. He was issued license plate number 1640 for his Winton automobile.

The Winton Motor Carriage Company of Cleveland, Ohio, is credited with being the first company in the United States to sell a motor car. The vehicles were termed "horseless carriages" and included gas lamps, padded seats, and rubber tires made by the Goodrich Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio. The Winton automobiles were often built with wealthy and affluent individuals in mind. The cars were often enormous, luxurious, and very elegant. The seven-passenger Winton Model M touring car had a price tag of \$3,500.

Nicholas B. Claudon (1855-1915) was a prominent Fairbury businessman who started a grain business where Ace Hardware is now located. Next, he moved the grain business to the current location of Farmer's Grain on East Walnut Street. After finishing high school, his son Chester J. Claudon (1884-1980) joined him in the grain business. In 1907, C. J. Claudon received license plate number 2225 for his Dayton automobile. Since he was only twenty-three years old, his father likely purchased the car. C. J. Claudon later became one of the pioneer auto dealers in central Illinois selling the Stoddard-Dayton brand.

Dr. Henry A. Presler (1869-1946) was a veterinarian in Fairbury for 24 years. He was also a Mayor of Fairbury. Dr. Presler was issued license plate number 5152 for his Maxwell automobile. The Maxwell dealership in Fairbury was located where Steidinger Tire is now located on Locust Street.

William Jennings Bethard owned and operated a department store on the east end of Locust Street. His store was a competitor to the Walton Bros. store. W. J. Bethard was issued license plate number 6579 for his Studebaker.

Robert A. Mack (1870-1947) was a farmer and businessman. He farmed 6 miles north of Fairbury. He owned the Illinois Hotel (where the new City Hall is now located) and was a Director at The Commercial State Bank. His Maxwell was issued license plate number 7256.

Thomas A. Beach (1828-1911) was a Fairbury banker and businessman. It is estimated that when he died, he was worth \$50 million in today's dollars. His "Lion House" on East Hickory street is on the National Register of Historic Places. His Pope-Waverly was issued license number 8717. The Pope-Waverly was a battery-operated electric car.

Joseph Jesse Slagel (1883-1915) was a Fairbury inventor who operated a machine shop at the northwest corner of Locust and Sixth Streets. His Cadillac was issued license number 9062.

Dr. Leroy Kuhn was a surgeon and practiced medicine in Fairbury. His Maxwell was issued license number 9876.

Of the ten Illinois license plates issued to Fairbury citizens in 1907, seven of the automobile owners were businessmen, two were medical doctors, and one was a veterinarian. Three of the ten cars were Maxwell's, and seven different manufacturers made the rest. This 1907 information illustrates that early automobiles were too expensive to be owned by the common working man, and there were hundreds of car manufacturers.



1907 Maxwell Automobile



## **CHAPTER 57**

### **Surviving World's Fairs, Depressions, and World War II**

The first Fairbury Fair was held back in 1876, which was 145 years ago. Since its inception, the Fairbury Fair has only been canceled seven times.

John Virgin (1838-1900) was a Civil War veteran and a Fairbury businessman. He specialized in importing large Percheron draft horses from France. John sold these horses to Fairbury area farmers. John Virgin was very active in the Fairbury Fair and the Illinois State Fair. He was also President of the American Percheron Association.

Because of John's extensive agricultural experience, the governor of Illinois appointed John Virgin to design and build the agricultural exhibit at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition. This event is often called the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

Many Fairbury area residents attended the Chicago World's Fair by taking a passenger train to Chicago. Fairbury's wealthiest citizen, Thomas A. Beach, traveled to the Chicago World's Fair. Mr. Beach was estimated to have had a net worth of over \$50 million when he died in 1911. His "Lion House" home still stands on East Hickory Street. Because the Chicago World's Fair was such a popular event, no Fairbury Fair was held in 1893.

In October of 1929, the Stock Market crashed and ended the Roaring Twenties. This stock market crash was the start of a ten-year-long Great Depression in the United States. Unemployment quickly soared to about 25 percent of the workforce. Bread lines became common in the big cities.

In 1931, the organizers of the fair reviewed the expenses of past fairs. They decided they needed to raise \$2,500 before they conducted the fair. Mr. J. P. Cook was put in charge of the citizen's committee to raise the \$2,500. When only \$925 could be raised, J. P. Cook announced that the

decision had been made not to have a 1931 Fairbury Fair because of general financial and business conditions.

As economic conditions further deteriorated during the Great Depression, officials decided there would be no Fairbury Fair in 1932 and 1933. The Fairbury Fair finally resumed in 1934.

About three months after the 1941 Fairbury Fair, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, initiating World War II. Fairbury supported the World War II effort by sending many men and women to serve in the military. Fairbury businesses sold war bonds, and local citizens bought them to finance the war. Rationing of many commodities, including food, gasoline, and tires, was introduced to support the war effort. Numerous scrap drives were conducted to collect metal, which could be reprocessed into military weapons.

Because of the World War II effort, the decision was made not to have Fairbury Fairs in 1942 and 1943. On June 6, 1944, D-Day, the most massive amphibious attack in the history of the world, was successfully conducted by Allied Forces. Because the war was going well by the summer of 1944, the decision was made to hold a 1944 Fairbury Fair.

Because it had been three years since the last Fairbury Fair, the event organizers wanted to put on a spectacular show. They booked a previous act that had been very popular with fair-goers, B. Ward Beam's International Congress of Daredevils. Some of their thrillers included the "Dive Bomber Crash," "Tunnel of Fire," and "Dynamite Drive," which involved crashing into a solid brick wall with an auto. Several dancing companies were also booked as entertainment and a female skating act called "the Rollateers."

In the winter of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread throughout the world quickly. Ordinary life was shut down in the United States for several months as citizens remained isolated in their homes. However, by the summer months, businesses and institutions gradually started a slow reopening process.

Because of the pandemic virus, all outdoor events with large numbers of attendees were canceled to minimize the spread of the virus. After much

research, the Fairbury Fair organizers decided to cancel the fair and resume it in 2021.

The Fairbury Fair has survived a competing World's Fair in 1893, the Great Depression in the 1930s, and World War II in the 1940s. Organizers plan to resume the Fairbury Fair in 2021. Hopefully, the Fairbury Fair will continue to survive future catastrophic events and provide entertainment to many more generations of Fairbury citizens.



Fairbury Fair circa 1919



## **CHAPTER 58**

### **Early Fairbury Photographer A.J. Swap**

Fairbury has always had at least one photographer operating a studio since the town was founded in 1857. One of these early photographers was Albert J. Swap. His family story began with the birth of his father, Albert E. Swap, in 1839 in New York. When Albert E. Swap was nine years old, he and his family moved to Wisconsin for two years. The family then moved again to LaSalle County, Illinois. When Albert E. Swap was twenty-two years old, he enlisted in Company C, Seventh Illinois Cavalry. His unit fought in many of the more minor battles that occurred during the Civil War. The Battle of Corinth was the most famous battle they fought in. Albert E. Swap was honorably discharged in 1865.

After the Civil War, Albert E. Swap returned to farming in the LaSalle area. In 1866, he married Miss Sarah E. Watson of Mendota, Illinois. They had four children, but two died in infancy. Albert and Sarah Swap moved their family to Weston, Illinois. Albert E. Swap engaged in the mercantile business in Weston. Albert and Sarah then moved to Fairbury. Mr. Swap ran a Fairbury grocery store until 1908, when he retired. Mr. Swap was a very active member of the Fairbury GAR (Grand Army of the Republic). Albert Swap died at age 76 in 1915 in Fairbury. He was buried in Mendota, Illinois.

One of Albert and Sarah Swap's children was Albert Jay Swap. A.J. Swap was born in 1868. After finishing in the local schools, A.J. continued his studies at Valparaiso College in Indiana. While at college, A.J. met and married Miss Ida Mitchell of Barry, Illinois, in 1891. Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Swap never had any children.

In 1890, the Fairbury City Council passed a new ordinance about traveling photographers. The rule prohibited photographers from conducting business in cars, wagons, tents, or portable houses unless they paid \$3.00 per day for a city license. The fine for violating this new ordinance was between \$5.00 and \$25.00 for every offense.

Mr. Swap had been trained as an accountant and took a job as an accountant for a Peoria wholesale grocery company. After working a couple of years as an accountant, Mr. and Mrs. Swap studied photography so they could work together. Around 1894, A.J. Swap offered his photography services in Fairbury. He set up his store in a building on Third Street.

In 1895, Mrs. A.J. Swap became one of the founding members of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in Fairbury. In 1896, the Blade recounted that A.J. Swap's photograph car would be parked just west of Churchill's elevator. This elevator used to be on the south side of Locust Street, between First and Second Streets. Mr. Swap must have bought the \$3.00 license required, so he complied with the city ordinance prohibiting traveling photographers.

In 1897, photographers A.J. Swap and E.M. Phillips both had a photography display at the Fairbury Fair. Around January of 1900, Mr. and Mrs. Swap decided to move to La Harpe, Illinois. La Harpe is on the TP&W railroad line, just east of the Iowa border. In the May 1900 issue of the Blade, a notice was published that Mr. Joslin had purchased Mr. Swap's recently vacated Third Street photography studio.

In the 1900 U.S. Census, A.J. and his wife Ida had moved to La Harpe, Illinois. On this census, A.J. listed his occupation as a photographer. After living in La Harpe a few years, an excellent job occurred with the Western Stoneware Company at Monmouth, Ill. A.J. Swap accepted this position as an accountant. This company then purchased a pottery company in Clinton, Missouri. After moving to Clinton, the company wanted A.J. Swap to move to Oklahoma. Mr. and Mrs. Swap enjoyed living in Clinton, so he refused the job transfer and instead took a new job as a mail carrier.

As a letter carrier, A.J. Swap practiced his religion of universal kindness and brotherly love. He performed many acts of kindness. These acts of kindness included helping the ill, supplying a wheelchair when needed, dispensing charity to a family in sore distress, and relieving human suffering whenever he could. One of Mr. Swap's friends gave him the title of "the postman of good cheer." A.J. Swap retired after working 25 years as a letter carrier.

Mr. Swaps' health started to fail due to a bad heart condition. When new medicines suggested by his doctor did not seem to work, Mrs. Swap sensed the end of her husband's life was near. A.J. Swap loved to read newspapers. That evening, Mrs. Swap read to him about the latest German-British developments in South America. Mr. Swap went to bed and passed away at 10 PM in January of 1940. He was buried in Park Lawn Cemetery in Clinton, Missouri.

Mrs. A.J. Swap passed away in 1952 in Clinton, Missouri. She was buried with her husband in the Park Lawn Cemetery.

A review of the historical data indicates that A.J. Swap was a Fairbury photographer between 1894 and 1900. In that era, cabinet card photographs were very popular. They were a photographic print pasted to a larger cardboard card measuring about 4.5 by 6.5 inches. Many of these old cabinet cards continue to be discovered. They have the words "A. Jay Swap" and "Fairbury" printed on the photograph. Such old photos likely date to the 1894 to 1900 era in Fairbury.

Although A.J. Swap only practiced photography for about six years in Fairbury, his cabinet card photos taken over 120 years ago are still in excellent condition. Many of these old cabinet cards are still being discovered today.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including A.J. Swap. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



**Fairbury, Illinois**

**A. JAY SWAP.**

Photograph of Benjamin and Eliza Doonan Hieronymous



## **CHAPTER 59**

### **The DeLong's Were Early Fairbury Photographers**

The story of the DeLong family began with the birth of Reuben F. DeLong (1802-1883) in Vermont. Reuben married Lydia B. Streater (1803-1889) in 1821 in Ohio when he was 19 years old. After they were married, Reuben and Lydia lived in Portage County, Ohio. Reuben and Lydia DeLong had seven children in Ohio.

One of the sons of Reuben DeLong was Cyrus Anson DeLong. He was born in 1828 in Ohio. In 1851, at the age of 22, C.A. DeLong married Sarah Matilda Fletcher (1834-1873) in Ohio. Cyrus and Sarah had a son Eugene in 1852 and another son Frank in 1854 while they were living in Ohio. Cyrus moved his family from Ohio to Wilmington, Illinois, around 1858. Their third son, William DeLong, was born in Wilmington in 1858.

In the 1860 U.S. Census, Reuben and Lydia DeLong lived in Esmen Township in Livingston County, Illinois. The only child still living with them was Dewitt DeLong.

In the same 1860 Census, Cyrus, his wife, and three sons lived in Wilmington, Illinois. Cyrus DeLong listed his occupation as a shoemaker on that census.

Another son of Reuben and Lydia DeLong was Gypson DeLong. In 1861, he enlisted in the Third Illinois U.S. Cavalry in Fairbury, Illinois. On his military application, he listed his occupation as a shoemaker. He became a bugler in this cavalry unit during the Civil War. This unit was primarily men from the Fairbury area.

Sometime between 1860 and 1864, C.A. DeLong moved his family from Wilmington to Fairbury. He also learned the photography trade. In 1864, his photography shop on Locust Street in Fairbury printed a photo of

Andrew Voss. This 156-year-old photograph still survives today and is in excellent condition.

To raise money during the Civil War, the U.S. government passed a new law in 1864 requiring a tax stamp to be purchased and affixed to any photographs. The photographer had to buy a two-cent stamp if the picture price was 25 cents or less. A tax of three cents was required if the photo price was between 26 and 50 cents. A five-cent stamp was required for photos with a price between 51 cents and a dollar. For images with a price of one dollar or more, in addition to the five-cent stamp, an extra five cents was assessed for every additional dollar or fractional part thereof.

For this 1864 photograph taken in Fairbury, photographer C.A. DeLong complied with the federal law, and he affixed a five-cent tax stamp to the back of the picture. The use of the five-cent stamp indicated the price for the photo was between 50 cents and \$1.00. In today's dollars, the cost of this photo was between \$9.00 and \$17.00.

In 1865, the State of Illinois conducted a census. In this census, Reuben DeLong and his photographer son C.A. DeLong lived in Indian Grove Township.

In 1905, the Blade published a photo showing the business buildings on the north side of Locust Street between Third and Fourth Streets. This photo was attributed to C.A. DeLong around the year 1865. The caption to this old photo recounted that Booth and DeLong had a shoe store in one building. The building next door had a business owned by Byron Phelps. The newspaper caption also stated that in 1867, a wood-burning TP&W locomotive caught the wooden elevator across the street on fire. The big fire jumped across the street and burned out the buildings on the north side of Locust Street.

The Chicago Tribune published a story about the big fire in 1867 in Fairbury. Their article reported that C.A. DeLong lost \$500 in household goods in the fire.

In the 1870 U.S. Census, Reuben DeLong and his wife moved from Fairbury to Nebraska. No mention of C.A. DeLong and his family could be found in this census.

In that era, husbands and wives would often learn photography together. This practice allowed the couple to work together. Early Fairbury photographer A.J. Swap and his wife both learned photography so they could work together. It is likely that Mrs. C.A. DeLong also had learned the photography business.

Losing his photography business in a fire prompted C.A. DeLong to start investigating moving his photography business to Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the transition period of closing his Fairbury store and opening his Minneapolis store, he left his wife in charge of the Fairbury operation. The Fairbury Echoes Museum has an old photograph with the wording "Photographed by Mrs. DeLong, N.E. Corner of Fourth & Locust Sts., Fairbury, Ill."

By 1871, C.A. DeLong had moved to Minnesota, and he entered some of his photographs in the Minneapolis Fair. In 1873, sadness struck the DeLong family. Mrs. C.A. DeLong died at the age of only 38. Within one year of his first wife's death, C.A. DeLong married his second wife, Marietta Trumbull, in Minnesota. They had a son Joseph DeLong in 1875. In 1875, the State of Minnesota conducted a state-wide census. C.A. DeLong was recorded as living in Minneapolis.

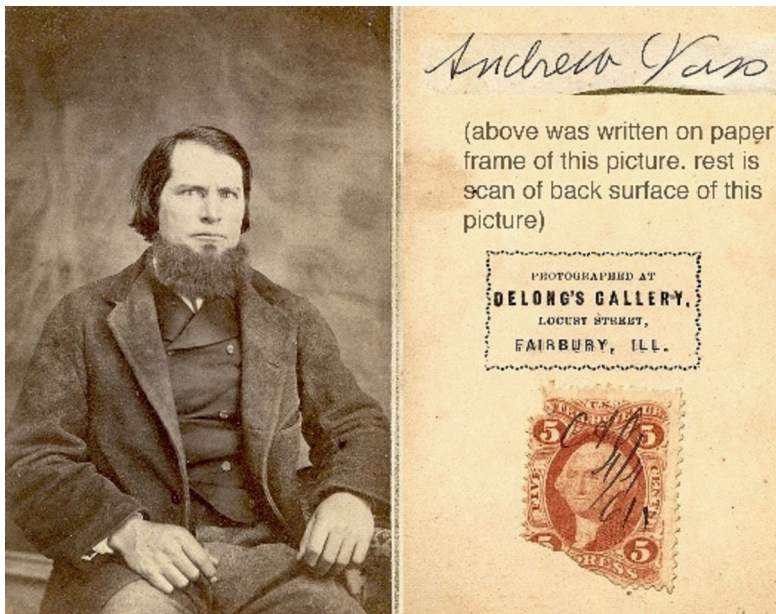
In 1925, the Blade published an article saying that C.A. DeLong took a photograph of the Old Settlers Association gathered at the first Fairbury Fair in 1876. Since this article was published almost 50 years after the event, the accuracy of the date is suspect. It is possible that C.A. DeLong returned from Minneapolis to attend the Fairbury Fair and took a photograph.

In 1878, the son of C.A. DeLong, 26-year-old Eugene DeLong, died unexpectedly at age 26 in Minneapolis. Young Eugene DeLong was a well-liked young man in Minneapolis.

In 1881, C.A. DeLong moved his photography business to Canton, South Dakota. His father, Reuben DeLong, had moved to this area several years before. Unfortunately, photographer C.A. DeLong passed away in 1883. He was only 55 years of age.

Mr. and Mrs. C.A. DeLong operated their Fairbury photography business between the years 1860 and 1871. It is incredible that some of C.A. DeLong's over 150-year-old photos still survive today and are in excellent condition.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including C.A. DeLong. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



Photograph of Andrew Voss taken at DeLong's Gallery in Fairbury

## **CHAPTER 60**

### **Early Fairbury Photographer E.M. Phillips**

The story of early Fairbury photographer E.M. Phillips began with the birth of his father, Jacklin Phillips, in 1823 in West Virginia. When Jacklin Phillips was nine years old, he moved with his family to Franklin County, Indiana. In Indiana, he met Margaret McQuig, whom he married in 1840. Jacklin and Margaret had five children. Jacklin Phillips moved his family to Fairbury in 1859. Jacklin Phillips was 60 years old when he died. He was buried in the Fairbury Cemetery in 1883.

One son of Jacklin and Margaret Phillips was Edward McQuig Phillips. He was born in Indiana in 1854. When he was five years old, his family moved to Fairbury. E.M. Phillips married Miss Frances Munhall in 1875 in Livingston County. Their only child, Mayme Phillips, was born in 1882. She graduated from Fairbury Township High School when she was 16 years old.

In the 1880 U.S. Census, E.M. Phillips reported his occupation as working in a Fairbury flour mill. It is likely that sometime after 1880, Mr. Phillips started working in the photography gallery in the store of the Watson Brothers.

In 1888, Watson Brothers sold its photography department to E.M. Phillips. Later that year, the Blade recounted that E.M. Phillips had a significant demand for life-size ink drawings.

In 1889, E.M. Phillips took photos of the Fairbury Township High School graduating class at the Fairbury Opera House. In that era, high school graduations were held in the Opera House. In 1890, photographer E.M. Phillips entered crayon drawings and photograph collections in the Fairbury Fair.

In that era, Fairbury merchants would sponsor a Carnival in the Opera House to attract shoppers to Fairbury. The merchants had a unique dress designed for a young girl that included products of their business. For example, for Straight's Milling Company, Fribbie Filley's hat was prettily

decorated with ears of corn, grain, and fancy grass. Another example was the bank of Bartlett, Beach, and Dominy. The bank attired young Jessie Dominy in a black silk dress lavishly ornamented with paper money and coins. In 1893, E.M. Phillips sponsored Miss Dora Eads in the contest. Miss Eads won the prize of a gold ring offered by A.H. Mundt for being the most appropriately dressed in the competition.

Alma Lewis James, the author of the Fairbury history book, *Stuffed Clubs & Antimacassars*, recounted that Fairbury merchants often published poems to entice customers to visit their store. Alma wrote that E.M. Phillips used such a poem to try to attract customers to his photography gallery upstairs at Walton's. One of his poems was, "If you cannot cross the country, Or the foreign lands explore, You can spend your money nearer, There are Klondikes at your door, Down on Main Street there is Phillips, Over Walton's Store, With his every-ready camera, He will meet you at the door." A Klondike was an enclosed buggy that became popular with farmers in the wintertime.

Robert Brunskill worked as an assistant to E.M. Phillips in his photography business. In 1895, Robert Brunskill married Flora Driggs from McDowell. In 1896, Walton Brothers experienced its second massive fire in Fairbury. The blaze destroyed the photography business of E.M. Phillips. In 1897, E.M. Phillips tried to sell his photography gallery. Unfortunately, he had to take it back and operate it.

In 1900, E.M. Phillips sold his Fairbury photography business. Mr. Phillips purchased a photograph gallery in Danville, Illinois. The *Blade* recounted that E.M. Phillips was one of the best photographers in the country with his many years of experience. The *Blade* also noted that Mr. Phillips always kept himself well posted in the latest discoveries in his chosen art. Mr. Phillips told the *Blade* the only reason he was leaving Fairbury was to gain a more extensive customer base for his photography business.

The only child of Mr. and Mrs. Phillips was Mayme Phillips. She finished Fairbury Township High School in 1898 at age sixteen. She then attended Eastern Illinois Normal school at Charleston. After her college graduation, she became a teaching career in Danville. She taught school in Danville for the rest of her life. Mayme never married and died in 1921.

Besides a broader market for his photography business, E.M. Phillips had other reasons to choose to move to Danville. Two of his brothers, John and Edward, were living in Danville. His brother John Phillips in 1860, became an assistant to a deaf photographer in Fairbury. In 1871, John moved to Danville. John eventually owned an extensive laundry service in Danville. John Phillips died in 1915 and was buried in Danville.

E.M. Phillips' sister, Orra Phillips, also lived in Danville. She initially attended Fairbury schools and graduated in the first high school class to graduate in Fairbury. She taught grade school in Fairbury for many years. In 1896, she moved to Danville and became a school teacher there. She never married and was a school teacher her entire life. She died in 1930 in Danville.

After E.M. Phillips moved to Danville, he eventually switched from photography to the real estate field. He was very active in the Danville community and was a member of the Elks, the I.O.O.F. Lodge, and St. James Methodist Church.

Mrs. E.M. Phillips died in Danville in 1930 at age 75. Mr. Phillips died in 1932 at the age of 78. Both of them were buried in Danville.

Mr. E.M. Phillips operated his Fairbury photography business between 1880 and 1900. It is incredible that some of E.M. Phillips's old photos still survive today. Even though some of his photos are over 130 years old, they are still in excellent condition.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including E.M. Phillips. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



E. M. Phillips photo of two children and a doll



## **CHAPTER 61**

### **W. E. Hummel was 20th Century Fairbury Photographer**

The story of Fairbury photographer W.E. Hummel began with the birth of his father, William Hummel, in 1836 in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He married Mary Sabold of Linfield, Pennsylvania, on May 10, 1862. William Hummel was a veteran of the Civil War. He served with Company G of the 175th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers at West Chester. He served under General Foster and participated in campaigns along the South Atlantic Coast towards Savannah. At one time, he was employed as a lock tender during the Schuylkill Canal's heyday. William died in 1911 in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

William and Mary Hummel had two children. Daughter Catherine Gertrude Hummel (1866-1939) married George O. Stott. Catherine and George lived their whole lives in Pennsylvania.

The other child of William and Mary Hummel was William E. Hummel. He was born in 1862 in Pennsylvania. At a very early age, W.E. Hummel became interested in the field of photography. He became a self-taught photographer and opened a gallery in Skaneateles, New York.

While working in Skaneateles, W.E. Hummel met a young lady named Miss Cora Blanche Leahy of Syracuse. They were married in October of 1906. Mr. Hummel was 44 years old when he married 25-year-old Cora Leahy. While they were living in Pennsylvania, they had two sons, William Jr. and Walter Hummel.

In 1910, W.E. Hummel moved his family to Fairbury, Illinois. He took a job in the Chase Studio at Fairbury. In April of 1913, he purchased the business located on the second story of the Walton building. After they moved to Fairbury, William and Cora's third son, Jack Hummel, was born in Fairbury in 1913.

In the 1910s, Fairbury was often called the motorcycle capital of the world. Brothers Frank and William Goudy started racing motorcycles on

local tracks. They quickly began racing on tracks all over the United States. They won many races and held world speed records. Both Frank and William Goudy were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998.

Carl Goudy reached his peak in late 1915 when he won the prestigious Chicago motorcycle race. After the Chicago race was over, Carl loaned his high-speed motorcycle to his brother William Goudy.

In January of 1916, William Goudy took the fast bike to a California race track. William and another professional racer started doing practice laps on the trail. A third professional driver entered the track and passed the other two drivers. After he passed William and the other driver, he accidentally dumped his motorcycle on the track. To avoid hitting the downed bike and driver, William swerved in one direction, and the other driver swerved in the other direction. Unfortunately, both William and the other driver were instantly killed when they struck objects on the border of the track. Carl Goudy buried his brother William Goudy in a nearby California Cemetery.

In that era, Fairbury had a motorcycle club with a large number of riders in the club. W.E. Hummel took several iconic photographs in the 1910s showing these early motorcycles in the downtown area of Fairbury. Several of these historic photographs still survive today.

In 1917, the hot topic among American photographers was how to get beautiful sepia-like tones in developing photographs. W.E. Hummel wrote a letter to the editor of the Bulletin of Photography and included an example of his photographic print. Mr. Hummel said that Fairbury got its city water from artesian wells 2,000 feet deep. Because this water had a trace of sulfur, when the water was used to help produce photographs, it gave the desired sepia tone. Mr. Hummel further recounted that he missed the distinctive taste of Fairbury water when he traveled away from Fairbury.

In the 1920 U.S. Census, W.E. Hummel and his family lived in a 206 West Walnut Street house.

On March 28, 1923, the entire Walton's store was destroyed by a massive blaze. Following the fire, W.E. Hummel set up his place of business in the

Keck building, west of Walton's department store. Eventually, his son William Hummel Jr. joined him in the photography business.

When the department store of the Walton Bros. burned for the third time in 1923, the whole town of Fairbury was afraid they would not rebuild a third time. Fortunately for Fairbury, John W. Walton and his son were able to finance the building of the most magnificent store in Central Illinois at that time. For that era, it was a massive project to build a large new two-story building. W.E. Hummel captured a few photographs of the new building in 1923. Copies of a few of these rare photographs still exist today.

In the 1930 U.S. Census, William and Cora Hummel lived in a house at 200 West Walnut Street in Fairbury. All three sons were still living at home when this census was taken. Cora Hummel died in 1935 in Fairbury at the age of 53. W.E. Hummel passed away in 1938 in Fairbury at the age of 76. Both William and Cora are buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery.

W.E. Hummel was a photographer for 28 years between 1910 and 1938. Many of his photographs are now over 100 years old, but they are in perfect condition. Some of his most iconic photos that still survive include Fairbury motorcycle scenes and the construction of the Walton Department Store in 1923.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including W.E. Hummel. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



Hummel Photograph of Walton's Being Rebuilt in 1923 after the Third Fire

## **CHAPTER 62**

### **Fairbury Photographer Dudley Fultz Had Interesting Life**

John Henry Fultz was born in 1842 in Hagerstown, Maryland. Harriett Natholia Swisher was born in 1846 in West Virginia. In 1868, John and Harriett got married in Livingston County, Illinois. They settled on a farm near Weston, Illinois.

Sadly, the first two children of John and Harriett Fultz, Hattie and Charles, died before they were three years old. By 1885, John and Harriett had five more children between the ages of one and eleven. In March of 1885, Harriett Fultz became very ill. She told her oldest child, Dudley Dayton Fultz that she had arranged for a neighboring farmer to raise him if something happened to her.

Mrs. John Fultz died in 1885 at the age of 39. Within one year, John Fultz married Margaret A. Brown. They left 11-year-old Dudley with a neighbor's family and took the other four children with them to Colorado. Ten years after arriving in Colorado, John Fultz died in 1895 at the age of 53.

Dudley Fultz went to live with the Hester family along Route 24 just east of Chenoa. His food often consisted of rice and a glass of milk every day. Dudley later recounted that back in those days, there was no emphasis on personal hygiene like today. Dudley reported that he had a bath every spring and fall, whether he needed it or not.

His foster father had a plant nursery on his farm. Dudley spent long hours working with the seedlings. He learned that he did not want to grow up to be a nurseryman. Dudley next went to live at the Robert Stewart home. He was expected to work to earn his keep. Stewart was a staunch Scotch Presbyterian and forbade the youth to whistle on Sundays.

Dudley liked to learn, so he attended country school and worked in the fields after school. One night, he worked so late in the field that he fell asleep doing his homework that night. The following day at school, when he did not have all his homework done, his teacher made him write, "Procrastination is the thief of time" 50 times on the blackboard.

One of his country school teachers told him about a "teacher's school" at Normal and encouraged him to work toward being a teacher. Three months before his 16th birthday, he walked to Chenoa and took the train to Normal. At that time, each prospect for college admittance was interviewed by the president. During this interview, it was discovered Dudley was a few months short of the minimum admittance age of 16. Dudley was sent to a prep school in Bloomington while he lived with an aunt. He got such good grades at the prep school that the university admitted him.

Dudley received his teaching diploma a few months before he turned 18 years of age. Desperate to support himself, he interviewed for a Towanda teaching job. When he admitted to the school board president that he was not quite 18 years old, the president said he would tell no one if Dudley did not tell anyone.

Some of the new ideas that Dudley had just learned at ISNU were not popular with small-town school boards. Because of this, Dudley moved around and taught at several different Central Illinois schools. He also grew very interested in the relatively new field of photography. It became his primary hobby.

Dudley Dayton Fultz married Iva Beatrice Mapel in 1899. They had three daughters named Ivis Beth, Lileth, and Arla Zenith. Dudley and Iva divorced, and he married Stella Lamp in 1920. Dudley and Stella had two daughters named Valerie Mae and Gloria.

In 1907, Dudley gave up his teaching career and moved to Fairbury. He started out selling business forms to local companies. He also fixed up a darkroom and was soon making pictures for profit. Being a photographer became an almost six-decade-long profession. He also sold Zenith radios in his shop.

In that era, Bloomington was known as the circus capital of the United States. Some of the world's great aerial acts were headquartered there. These aerial acts included the Wards, the Costello's, and Valentina. When Jennie and Bessie Ward were killed in the Hagenbeck-Wallace wreck at Sheldon, Dudley made the much-in-demand photos of the graveside rites in Bloomington. Another photograph he took was of the famed aerialist, Miss Leitzel, sitting on his camera box on the show grounds in Bloomington.

In addition to the circus performers, Dudley took photos of Frank Gotch, the world's champion wrestler. He also took pictures of boxing greats Jess Willard and Bob Fitzsimmons. Dudley's camera also captured cowboy Tom Mix.

In the 1910s, Fairbury was known as the motorcycle capital of the world. Dudley Fultz owned the first Indian motorcycle in Fairbury. Carl and William Goudy were world-class Excelsior motorcycle racers and were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998. Dudley Fultz took various photographs of these early Fairbury motorcycle owners.

Dudley photographed thousands of weddings, anniversaries, reunions, and wrecks. For more than 25 years, he was the official photographer for the TP&W Railroad. Back in that era, the railroad had many wrecks that required photographs to document the accidents.

First-grade photographs by Fultz became a ritual for more than a generation of Fairbury students. Many of these children later had their wedding photos taken by Dudley. In some cases, Dudley took wedding anniversary photos of these same children. He was remembered as a tall, lean man with the memory of an elephant. Dudley Fultz lived to be 101 years old and died in 1975.

Dudley Fultz was a Fairbury photographer from 1907 until 1962. He retired at age 92 in 1962 and sold his business to Bill Morse of Pontiac. Although some of his photographs are over 100 years old, they are still in excellent condition. Many of his First Grade class photos and Fairbury motorcycling images still survive and are valued treasures to their owners.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including Dudley Fultz. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



Dudley Fultz - Fairbury Photographer



## **CHAPTER 63**

### **Allis-Chalmers Dealer West of Dave's Supermarket**

Many Fairbury residents remember when there was an Allis-Chalmers dealership just west of Dave's Supermarket. The story of this dealership began with the birth of Christian Moser in Alsace, France. When his sister and her husband decided to emigrate to America, Christian accompanied them. They initially settled in Adams County, Ohio. The nearest present-day city is Wauseon, Ohio. Christian started working for local farmers and saved his money. He sent his savings back to his mother in Alsace. In 1850, Christian's mother had accumulated enough money from Christian to pay for passage to America for herself, three of her daughters, and her son Benedict.

It is likely that Christian's mother and her children crossed the Atlantic and landed in New Orleans. They then traveled by boat up the Mississippi River to the Ohio River and on to northwest Ohio. It was less expensive in that era to use this route than landing on one of the East Coast port cities. The New Orleans route became an established route for Mennonites and Apostolic Christians coming to America from France and Germany. A Mennonite town grew up near New Orleans, where travelers could get help on their way north.

Benedict Moser was ten years old when he arrived in Ohio in 1850. In 1863, at the age of 23, Benedict married Verena Steiner of Ohio. Shortly after they were married in Ohio, they relocated to the Morton, Illinois, area. Benedict and Verena had six children.

One of Benedict Moser's children was Christen M. Moser. This son was born in 1870 in Morton. In 1893, Christen married Lydia Yoder of Morton. Lydia was 20 years old when she married Christen Moser. After Christen and Lydia were married, they moved from Morton to the Forrest area and had ten children. Their five sons included Carl, Menno, Walter, Silas "Si," and Elias "Eli." Their five daughters included Frances "Fannie," Gertrude, Ollie, LaVina, and Viola. In 1913, Lydia Moser died

of tuberculosis, leaving her husband to raise ten children between the ages of three and nineteen.

Eli Moser was born in Pleasant Ridge Township in 1902. Eli married Bertha Steidinger from Fairbury. Eli and Bertha married in 1926 and had three children. Eli Moser began his working career as a mechanic for auto dealer Jay Claudon. Eli became one of the best Ford Model T mechanics in Central Illinois.

Gottlieb Steidinger, the father-in-law of Eli Moser, owned a blacksmith shop at the northeast corner of Second and Walnut streets. Eli borrowed \$200 and bought the blacksmith shop from Gottlieb, and opened an implement business. Eli Moser named his company the E. Moser Garage with a street address of 111 South Second Street in Fairbury. Eli obtained a Pontiac automobile dealership and sold these cars until 1956. Mr. Moser also was awarded an Allis-Chalmers dealership.

In 1959, Eli Moser decided to retire, and he sold his business to son-in-law Wayne Moser. In retirement, Eli was active in Fairbury community affairs. He played an active role in building the Fairview Haven retirement home. Eli owned a Ford Model T and liked to drive it around Fairbury in nice weather. The Blade newspaper featured a photo of Eli and his Model T in May of 1978. Just a few months later, Eli Moser died at the age of 75. His old Ford Model T remains in the family and is currently located in California.

Wayne Milton Moser was the son of Carl Moser. Wayne was born in 1923 in Forrest. Wayne Moser served in World War II. He entered the Army Chemical Warfare Service in June of 1944 at Fort Sheridan. Wayne then served in Europe and received both the American and European Theatre Service Medals. Wayne Moser was discharged in June of 1946 as a Staff Sergeant. Shortly after he was released from the Army, Wayne Moser married Hellen Jean Green in Fairbury. Wayne and Hellen had four children.

In 1951, Wayne Moser joined the Fairbury Fire Department. Wayne eventually became the Chief of the Fire Department. During Wayne's time on the Fire Department, the significant fires included the Old Susannah restaurant, K&S auto sales, the Phillis lumberyard, the Central Opera

House on north Third Street, the old Opera House at Fifth, and Locust Streets, and the horse barns at the Fairbury Fairgrounds. During Wayne's 30 years on the Fire Department, the only fatality was when a vagrant died in a vacant house that burned northeast of the business district. Wayne Moser stepped down as the Fire Department Chief in 1983.

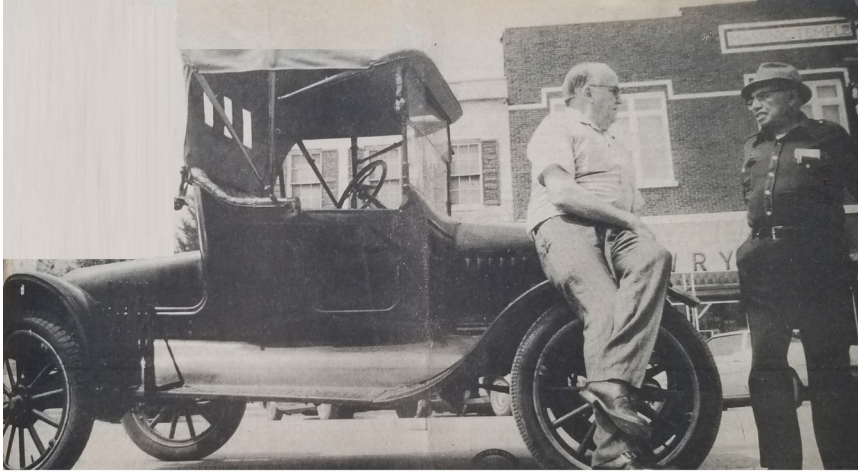
In 1961 Dennis Kaisner started working for Wayne Moser. Dennis was born in Fairbury in 1941. After working for Wayne for 15 years, Dennis Kaisner became a partner in the business. When Dennis Kaisner became a partner in the firm, they renamed the firm M&K Implement. Over the years, some of the firm's employees included Cleo Bunting, Mike Corkhill, Paul Moser, Carlos Moser, Steve Brucker, and Eli Meister. The firm's products included Allis-Chalmers tractors, Killbros wagons, Mayrath augers, Noble chisel plows, and Brady cultivators.

Dennis Kaisner was very active in the Fairbury Fair and served as the President of the Fair Board for many years. Mr. Kaisner died in 2015 at the age of 73.

In 1985, Allis-Chalmers was bought out by the German firm Deutz. The company name was changed from Allis-Chalmers to Deutz-Allis. A few years later, Deutz-Allis became AGCO, and the Allis-Chalmers brand ceased to exist.

In 1987, Wayne Moser decided to retire at the age of 61. Dave's Supermarket needed more room for expansion to the west. Wayne Moser and Dennis Kaisner sold the land and the building to Dave Steffen. The contents of the building were sold at a public auction in late 1987. Dennis Kaisner went to work at the Honegger mill in Fairbury. Wayne Moser died in 2015 at the age of 91. Today, the land where the M&K Implement firm was located is now a semi-truck delivery area for Dave's Supermarket.

All of the three men involved with this business contributed to the betterment of the Fairbury community. Eli Moser played an active role in the building of the Fairview Haven retirement home. Wayne Moser served on the volunteer fire department for 30 years, including the position of Fire Chief. Dennis Kaisner was very active in the Fairbury Fair, and he was President of the Fair Board for many years.



1978 Photo of Eli Moser's 1920 Ford Model T on Locust Street. Eli Moser is standing on the right and friend Ed Bach is sitting on the fender.

## **CHAPTER 64**

### **Foltz Implement Dealership by Marsh Park**

Another Fairbury agricultural implement dealer that helped area farmers was the Foltz implement dealership. The story of the Foltz family in America traces back to Frederick Joseph Foltz (1730-1791). He emigrated from Rotterdam, Germany, to the Lebanon, Pennsylvania area. Descendants of Frederick Foltz gradually spread from Pennsylvania to Indianapolis, then on to Patoka, Illinois. The village of Patoka is about 75 miles east of St. Louis.

The third great-grandson of Frederick J. Foltz was Charles Elmer Foltz. He was born in 1879 in Patoka, Illinois. In 1899, when Charles Foltz was 20 years old, he married Lena Asby Gerrish. She was 21 years old when they married. Charles and Lena had seven children. Unfortunately, Lena died on Christmas Day in 1914 when she was 36 years of age. Her death left husband Charles Foltz with seven young children to raise by himself.

In 1915, Charles Foltz married Millie May Ilgenfritz. Millie was born in 1883, and she was 32 years old when she married Charles Foltz. Just one year after Charles and Millie were married, she passed away. Charles Foltz then married Bessie Fern Beckett. Bessie was born in 1891 and was 24 when she married Mr. Foltz. Charles and Bessie Foltz had four children.

One of the children of Charles and Lena Foltz was Elton Elmer Foltz. He was born in 1904 in Patoka. Elton Foltz married Esther Britt in 1924. She died at the age of 23 in 1929 and was buried in Cropsey. In 1935, Elton opened the Foltz Garage in Fairbury. His shop was initially at the northeast corner of Walnut and First Streets. The shop was later moved to a location on Route 24 on the west side of Fairbury. The business was then moved to a small building near Marsh Park.

In 1937, Elton Foltz was driving a car with Edgar Runyon on Route 24 near Gridley, Illinois. The steering system on the vehicle failed, and Elton's car bumped into another vehicle. Elton escaped without any injuries, but Edgar Runyon received cuts on his head that required stitches. In 1939, Elton Foltz married Hallie Runyon.

Herbert Max Foltz was the son of Charles Foltz and Bessie Beckett. Max was born in 1926 in Patoka and grew up in that area. Max served in World War II. After the war, Max married Minnie G. Lukaseck in 1949. They had two children.

In 1946, Elton Foltz decided to expand his Fairbury business. He built a new cement block building that was 50x60 feet in size at 513 West Maple Street. The new shop included an office, a showroom, and a parts section. The most significant part of the new shop was a repair department with large windows for better lighting.

It took about one year to complete the construction of the new shop. When the construction started, the new building was going to be owned by Elton Foltz and Howard C. Perrine. The two men were partners, and they had a Minneapolis-Moline dealership. By the time the building was completed, Mr. Perrine had sold his interest to Jack Schahrer. The firm changed names to the Foltz & Schahrer Implement Co. In 1949, Max Foltz went to work for his half-brother Elton Foltz in Fairbury. Another critical employee, Wilmer "Wimpy" Stork, also joined the firm that year.

In 1952, the firm had changed its name to the Fairbury Implement Company. They ran their first ad in the Pantagraph that year, and their business phone number was 491R2. In a 1957 Pantagraph ad, the company noted that it had become a Minneapolis-Moline and Massey-Ferguson equipment dealer.

In 1971, the business experienced a significant shock. Owner Elton Foltz was killed in a two-truck accident northwest of Forrest. A truck stopped at a stop sign pulled out in front of the truck driven by Elton Foltz. Mr. Foltz was killed immediately.

With the death of owner Elton Foltz, employee Max Foltz had to switch roles from company employee to business owner. Employee Albert "Junior" Bunting became a partner in the business with his friend, Max Foltz.

Ten years after founder Elton Foltz died, partner Junior Bunting died in 1981. Max Foltz and Wimpy Stork continued the business after Bunting's

death. Max Foltz served on the Fairbury Fire Department, including duty as the Assistant Chief.

In 1988 and 1989, Central Illinois experienced a terrible drought period. Crops were decimated, so area farmers did not need to purchase any agricultural equipment. Because of the reduction in business during the drought years, in 1993, Max Foltz decided to close the business. Both Max Foltz and Wimpy Stork had worked their entire 44-year careers at the firm selling and repairing Minneapolis-Moline and Massey-Ferguson tractors.

Max Foltz recounted that farmers were not well trained on the operation of tractors in the early years of the business. At the end of the day, a farmer would often remove the oil drain plug and drain the oil overnight. The farmer would put the oil drain plug on the driver's seat so the hired man would see it the next day. The next day, the hired man would ignore the oil drain plug, start up the tractor, and burn up the engine since it had no oil in it. Farmers learned there was no need to drain the oil every day.

Max also recounted the two most significant events in his career: the death of his half-brother, Elton Foltz, in 1971 and his partner and friend, Junior Bunting, in 1981. Twelve years after the business closed, long-time employee Wilmer Stork died at the age of 84 in 2015. One year later, in 2016, Max Foltz died at the age of 89.

Today, the only remnant remaining of the business is the building at 513 West Maple Street. The building is now used for storage by Steidinger Plumbing. The firm was in operation for 58 years and provided agricultural equipment and service to two generations of Fairbury area farmers.



Building at 513 West Maple Street built in 1945 by Elton Foltz



## **CHAPTER 65**

### **Jesse James' Brother was Starter at 1901 Fairbury Fair Horse Races**

In 1901, thousands of Fairbury Fair patrons got to see Frank James, one of the most famous men of the Wild West of the 1880s. The Fairbury Fair hired Frank James to be the starter of all the horse races at the 1901 Fair.

The story of Frank James began with his birth in 1843 in Kearney, Missouri. He was named Alexander Franklin James. His parents were Baptist minister Reverend Robert Sallee James and his wife, Zerelda Cole. Frank's brother was Jesse James (1847-1882).

The father of Frank and Jesse died in 1851. Frank was eight years old, and Jesse was only four years old when their father died. Their mother married Benjamin Simms in 1852. After Benjamin died, their mother married a third time to Dr. Reuben Samuel in 1855 when Frank was 13 years old. As a child, James showed interest in his late father's sizable library, especially the works of William Shakespeare. Census records show that James attended school regularly, and he reportedly wanted to become a teacher.

The Civil War began in 1861 when James was eighteen years old. The James family was from the heavily Confederate western portion of Missouri. The secessionists in Missouri, including Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson, attempted to drive the Union army out of the state but were eventually defeated. On September 13, 1861, the Missouri State Guard, including private Frank James, besieged Lexington, Missouri. James fell ill and was left behind when the Confederate forces retreated. He surrendered to the Union troops, was paroled, and was allowed to return home. Frank was arrested by the local pro-Union militia on his arrival home and was forced to sign an oath of allegiance to the Union.

After the withdrawal of regular Confederate troops in the fall of 1861, a bitter guerrilla conflict soon began between bands of pro-Confederate irregulars (commonly known as bushwhackers) and the Union home guards. By early 1863, Frank, ignoring his parole and oath of allegiance,

had joined the guerrilla band of Fernando Scott, a former saddler. He soon switched to the more active command led by William Clarke Quantrill.

Union militiamen searching for Fernando Scott raided the Samuel farm. They tortured Frank's stepfather, Dr. Reuben Samuel, to try to learn the location of Frank James and the guerrillas. Although they did not kill Dr. Samuel, they tortured him by hanging him. Shortly afterward, Frank took part with Quantrill's company in the August 21, 1863, Lawrence Massacre, where approximately 200 mostly unarmed civilians were killed.

Frank James was paroled on July 27, 1865, in Nelson County, Kentucky. There is a report that after his parole, Frank was involved in a gunfight in Brandenburg, Kentucky, with four soldiers that resulted in two soldiers killed, one wounded, and Frank wounded in the hip. However, there is an alternative account that claims in the autumn of 1865, Frank, who was in Kentucky going to Missouri, was suspected of stealing horses in Ohio and that Frank shot two members of a posse and escaped.

During his years as a bandit with his brother Jesse James, Frank was involved in at least four robberies between 1868 and 1876. These four robberies resulted in the deaths of bank employees or citizens. The most famous incident was the disastrous raid of Northfield, Minnesota, on September 7, 1876, that ended with the death or capture of most of the gang.

Five months after the killing of his brother Jesse in 1882, Frank James boarded a train to Jefferson City, Missouri, where he had an appointment with the Governor in the state capitol. Placing his holster in Governor Crittenden's hands, Frank explained that he had been hunted for twenty-one years, had literally lived in the saddle, and had never known a day of perfect peace. Frank ended his statement with the Governor by saying that he had not let another man touch his gun since 1861. Frank surrendered to the Governor with the understanding that he would not be extradited to Northfield, Minnesota.

Frank James was tried for only two of the robberies and murders that he was involved with. The first trial was in Gallatin, Missouri, for the July 15, 1881 robbery of the Rock Island Line train at Winston, Missouri. In this robbery, the train engineer and a passenger were killed. Former

Confederate General Joseph Orville Shelby testified on James' behalf in the Missouri trial. He was acquitted in this Missouri trial.

The second trial was for the 1881 robbery of a United States Army Corps of Engineers payroll at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Frank James was also acquitted in this Alabama trial. Frank James never served time in a prison and was never convicted of any charges.

For the remainder of his life, Frank James held many different odd jobs. He was also heavily involved in horse racing. In 1901 the Fairbury Fair hired him to be the starter for the horse races. To increase attendance, the Fairbury Fair advertised in local newspapers that Frank James, the notorious reformed outlaw brother of Jesse James and accomplice of the Younger Brothers, would officiate as the starter in each horse race.

The 1901 Fairbury Fair set an attendance record of over 10,000 patrons. Shortly after the Fairbury Fair concluded, the Blade recounted the horse races were good and hotly contested. The Blade reported that Frank James, the horse race starter, proved to be a good man for that job. In that era, there was always a great deal of jockeying done and much time wasted. Mr. James laid the law down to the drivers, and they obeyed it. The consequences were that the races went off without an undue amount of friction.

In the final years of his life, Frank James returned to the James Farm, giving tours for 25 cents. He died at the James Farm at age 72 on February 18, 1915. He left behind his wife, Annie Ralston James, and one son. He is interred in Hill Park Cemetery, in the western portion of Independence, Missouri.

In 1901, thousands of Fairbury Fair patrons got to see one of the most famous men of the Wild West of the 1880s. Frank James did a great job as a starter of all the horse races at the Fairbury Fair.

# **Fairbury**

# **FAIR**

**September 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1901**

Bigger and better than ever.

**KEMP SISTER'S WILD WEST SHOWS**  
will exhibit each and every day. See their high jumping horses and ponies. See their lassoing and riding of a wild bull. More startling, amusing and daring deeds than ever before performed by this best of all aggregation of Wild West performers.

## **BETTER AND FASTER RACES**

All racing purses are increased to \$300.

Do not miss the opportunity of seeing Frank James, the notorious reformed outlaw, brother of Jesse James and accomplice of the Younger brothers, who will officiate as starter in each race.

A. D. WESTERVELT, Secretary.

J. W. McDOWELL, President.

1901 Pantagraph Ad for Fairbury Fair

## **CHAPTER 66**

### **World War I Flying Ace Raced at Fairbury**

Eddie Rickenbacker was one of the most famous men of the twentieth century. He became a hero in World War I as a pilot and then became the President of Eastern Airlines. In 1914, Fairbury Fair attendees witnessed Eddie Rickenbacker race his automobile in the car races.

The story of Edward Rickenbacker began with his birth in 1890 in Columbus, Ohio. Eddie's parents were Swiss German-speaking immigrants. His father was Wilhelm Rickenbacker, and his mother was Liesl Basler. Eddie's father worked as a laborer, and his mother took in laundry to supplement the family income. With a loan from Lizzie's parents, Eddie's parents purchased a small home on Livingston Avenue.

Growing up in the little house, Eddie worked long hours before and after school. He helped in the garden (potatoes, cabbages, and turnips) and with the animals (chickens, goats, and pigs). Eddie brought in money by delivering papers, setting up pins at the bowling alley, and selling scavenged goods to the junk man. He gave most of his nickels to his mother, but he spent some on himself, including Bull Durham tobacco, a habit he picked up from his big brother Bill. Eddie was the local Horsehead Gang leader, with whom he smoked, played hooky, and, on at least one occasion, broke streetlamps up and down Miller Avenue.

Eddie was a hard worker and was streetwise tough, but he also had a sensitive and artistic side. He enjoyed painting watercolors of flowers, scenery, and animals. Eddie's life-long love affair with speed and machines also began in his early years. He and his Horsehead Gang buddies constructed pushcarts as a kind of precursor to the Soapbox Derby. Eddie famously tried to fly a bicycle outfitted with an umbrella from his friend's barn roof about the time of the Wright Brothers' first heavier-than-air flight. Another time, he decided to design a perpetual motion machine. His father scolded him for wasting his time on an invention that had no purpose.

Eddie's childhood came to a halt in the summer before his fourteenth birthday. His father got into an argument with William Gaines. Mr. Gaines struck Mr. Rickenbacker in the head with a level. Eddie's father was in a coma for six weeks before he died.

Though his older brother Bill and older sister Mary were working, Eddie felt responsible for replacing his father's lost income. He dropped out of school and went to work full time. He worked eight different jobs during the next two years. An intense admiration for machines drove him. Rickenbacker taught himself as much as he could, including enrolling in a correspondence course in engineering. He took the correspondence class while working at the Oscar Lear Automobile Company in Columbus, Ohio.

In 1910, at age 20, Rickenbacker was designated to drive his company's car in a 25-mile race in Red Oak, Iowa. He failed to win or even finish because he crashed through a fence. After this race, Eddie was hooked on speed. That summer, Eddie went on to win most of the dirt track races he entered.

Between 1910 and the start of World War I in 1917, Eddie raced autos on tracks all over the United States. He competed in the first-ever Indianapolis 500. In total, he competed in four of the Indianapolis 500 races before the war, earning the nickname "Fast Eddie."

Elias "Spud" Schlipf (1907-1978) was a colorful Fairbury personality. Spud was a car salesman or dealership owner his entire life. He was actively involved with promoting the Fairbury race track his whole life. In August of 1976, the Blade interviewed Spud about all the famous people who raced at Fairbury. Spud recounted that Newt Fulton was the Editor of the Blade and also the Fairbury Fair Secretary. Newt brought in Rickenbacker, a well-known car racer, and some other fellows for an exhibition. The six drivers drove their cars from the Fairgrounds, up Third Street, and around town. The drivers had their caps on backward, with the bills to the rear and their goggles on. The whole city was thrilled, and later that day, they raced on the half-mile track. Besides Eddie Rickenbacker, Spud recounted that four other Indy 500 winning drivers competed at Fairbury in the USAC midget races on the quarter-mile track. These other

Indy drivers were Bill Vukovich, Sam Hanks, Parnelli Jones, and Bobby Unser.

An exhaustive search of the Blade archives found two citations for an exhibition race at the fairgrounds on May 23, 1914. The first was a Blade article listing the names and cars for six well-known drivers and "several other well-known pilots." The second mention was an ad for the exhibition races. Those races started at 3 p.m., which matches Spud's description. Eddie Rickenbacker may have been one of the other "well-known" pilots. A national newspaper search found that Eddie was not racing anywhere else on May 23, 1914, the week before the Indy 500. Eddie did race in the 4th annual Indianapolis 500 on May 30 and finished 10th in a Duesenberg.

National newspaper searches in 1914 and 1915 often found mentions of Carl Goudy of Fairbury and Eddie Rickenbacker in the same editions. Carl was winning and setting world speed records in motorcycle racing while Rickenbacker was doing the same in the auto racing field.

For most people, being a world-class auto racer would be a great life story. In the case of Eddie Rickenbacker, auto racing was just the beginning of his life story. He next became a fighter pilot Ace in World War I. Eddie shot down a total of 26 enemy planes, a record that stood until World War II.

After World War I, Eddie formed the Rickenbacker Motor Company. It went bankrupt in 1927. He then bought and owned the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for 15 years. Eddie later founded and was President of Eastern Airlines for many years. Eddie Rickenbacker died in 1973 at the age of 82.

Interestingly, the small town of Fairbury had such famous visitors as Frank James and Eddie Rickenbacker because of the Fairbury Fair and race track.



Captain Edward V. Rickenbacker



## **CHAPTER 67**

### **Fairbury Business Celebrating 95th Anniversary**

Sam Walter & Son, one of the oldest businesses in Fairbury, is celebrating its 95th anniversary this year. The story of the business and the Walter family is linked to the founding of the Apostolic Christian church in America. The origins of the Apostolic Christian Church all trace back to Samuel Heinrich Froelich (1803-1857) in Switzerland. Froelich was a minister who developed several churches in Switzerland.

One of Froehlich's church members in Switzerland emigrated to Lewis County, New York, and joined an Amish church. In 1847, this church had an internal crisis. Froehlich's former church member stated that he knew a man who was knowledgeable about the issues dividing them and thought he might end their confusion. He said the man was Samuel Froehlich of Switzerland. The New York church petitioned for Froehlich to travel to New York to help the church solve its internal problems.

Instead, Froehlich sent newly ordained Benedict Weyeneth from Switzerland to New York. After solving the church's problem, Weyeneth returned to Switzerland and married Elizabeth Blunier. He and his bride returned to settle in America in 1851. They successively lived in New York, Ohio, Iowa, and Peoria. In 1857, Benedict and Elizabeth Weyeneth finally decided to settle in rural Roanoke, Illinois, permanently. Weyeneth was involved with establishing many of the Apostolic Christian churches along Route 24 in Illinois. Christina Blunier, younger sister of Elizabeth Blunier, also emigrated from Switzerland to Roanoke.

George Walter was born in 1839 in Alsace, France. He emigrated to the Eureka area in 1866 when he was 27 years old. A year later, George Walter married Christina Blunier in Roanoke. They farmed and had nine children.

One of the nine children of George and Christina Walter was Daniel Walter. He was born in 1874 in Roanoke. Daniel married Hannah Kyburz

in 1900 at Gridley, Kansas. Daniel was 26 when he married Hannah. She was born in Mackinaw in 1876 and was 24 when she married Daniel. They farmed near Wing and Saunemin for many years and then moved to Fairbury in 1941. Daniel and Hannah had nine children. Daniel died at the age of 92 in Fairbury in 1966.

Sam Daniel Walter was one of the nine children born to Daniel and Hannah Walter. Sam D. Walter was born in 1900 in Wing. He married Ruth S. Schlipf in 1923. She was born in 1901 in Forrest, and her parents were Jacob Schlipf (1866-1917) and Maria Bessler (1866-1922). Sam and Ruth Walter had four children. Their three sons were named Arthur, Richard, and Willard. Eleanor Walter was their only daughter.

In 1926, Sam D. Walter started repairing farm equipment and cars at his farm northeast of Fairbury. Bill Fugate now lives in this house. Sam eventually stopped repairing cars and focused on farm equipment.

Art Walter married Marjorie Jessup, and they lived in Fairbury. Art was a World War II veteran and then worked as an electrician. He installed electrical wiring for Eastland Mall in Bloomington, Pabst Blue Ribbon in Peoria, the Pontiac Prison, and dorms at Illinois State University. Art and Marjorie Walter had two children. She died in 2008 at the age of 81.

Eleanor Walter married Wayne M. Honegger. They had four children and lived in the Fairbury area. He died in 2018 at the age of 90.

Richard James Walter (1926-2016) and Willard Charles Walter (1929-2004) joined their father in the family business. Richard J. Walter married Colleen R. Moser, and they had five children. Willard C. Walter married Arlene Mae Zimmerman, and they had two children.

When Richard and Willard joined the business, welding repair was added as a service. Richard and Willard became the second generation to work in the family business of Walter & Son.

In 1953, a Ford dealership was obtained, and they began selling Ford agricultural equipment. The business was moved into Fairbury during the 1950s. In the 1960s, the company was moved to its current location east of

Fairbury on Route 24. The firm also added New Holland and New Idea farm equipment lines.

In 1971, Sam D. Walter retired after founding the business 45 years before. Also, during the early 1970s, Sam J. Walter, son of Richard Walter, became the third generation to join the business. The company started to pursue the outdoor power business. Company founder Sam D. Walter died in 1979 at the age of 78.

In 1989, the business lost its final agricultural dealership (New Holland). The owners decided to focus on selling and servicing top-quality brands of outdoor power equipment. In 2004, Willard C. Walter died at the age of 75. Kyle Walter, son of Sam J. Walter, worked at the family business in high school as part of the ICE program. Upon graduation in 2008, Kyle decided to join the company as the fourth generation.

In 2016, Richard J. Walter died at the age of 90. Sam J. Walter and his son Kyle Walter continued to operate the business. The most popular products sold at the company include Ariens, Gravely, and Exmark lawnmowers. The Echo brand of outdoor power equipment is also very popular. The firm also services many other different types of outdoor power equipment.

Sam Walter & Son is the second oldest business in Fairbury, operating for 95 years. Over the years, Sam Walter & Son has successfully adapted their business to fit the changing needs of their customers.



Sam Walter & Son is located on Route 24 East of Fairbury



## **CHAPTER 68**

### **K&S Ford Evolved from an International Farm Equipment Dealer**

The K&S Ford dealership has a fascinating business history. The story of this business began with the birth of Christian Wiedman in 1875 in Germany. He was the son of Johann J. Wiedman (1843-1933) and Elisabeth Gleuk (1841-1898).

Christian Wiedman emigrated from Germany to Morton, Illinois, in 1892 when he was 17 years old. In 1901, Christian was 25 years of age and married Pauline Karoline Wieland in Morton. Pauline was 26 years old when she married Christian Wiedman. They had eight children, and they lived their lives in the Morton area. Christian Wiedman died in 1932 at the age of 57. Pauline Wiedman passed away in 1967 at the age of 93.

One of the eight children of Christian and Pauline Wiedman was John Samuel Wiedman. John was born in 1902 in Morton. He moved to Fairbury in 1921 when he was 19 years old. John S. Wiedman owned and operated a chicken hatchery in Fairbury for many years.

1935 was a pivotal year for 33-year-old John S. Wiedman. He married 40-year-old Miss Lydia Schlipf in Fairbury. She was the daughter of Jacob Schlipf and Maria Bessler. Before her marriage, Lydia worked as a maid and lived at 108 Kuenzi Street in Fairbury. John and Lydia Schlipf spent the rest of their lives in Fairbury, and they had no children.

Also, in 1935, the Blade reported that John Wiedman, who operated the Fairbury Hatchery, had purchased of Mrs. Elizabeth Sorg, of Bloomington, the building occupied by Raymond Grover's garage. John Wiedman also obtained an International Harvester Company agricultural equipment dealership about this time.

Dr. A. W. Pendergast was a Fairbury optometrist. He was an avid collector of Native American artifacts. Another of his hobbies was collecting and repairing cigar store Indians. He became nationally known as an expert on

cigar store Indians. In early 1941, the wife of Dr. Pendergast was tragically killed in a car accident on an icy road by Weston. She was 58 years old, and funeral services were held in Terre Haute, Indiana. Within a few months of his wife's death, Dr. Pendergast sold his Fairbury house at 304 East Elm Street, and he moved to Terre Haute, Indiana. John and Lydia Wiedman purchased the home of Dr. Pendergast.

Several scrap metal drives were held in Fairbury during World War II. Farmers and citizens brought scrap metal items to Locust Street. All the collected materials were melted down and made into military items needed to fight World War II. John Wiedman helped to organize these scrap metal drives.

In 1954, John Wiedman was 52 years old. He decided to sell his implement business and building to Raymond "Dick" Koehl and Albert Stoller from Chenoa. The new firm was named the K&S Farm Store and continued the International Harvester Company agricultural equipment dealership. In 1956, they obtained a Ford Mercury and Comet automotive dealership franchise. In 1959, the International Harvester machinery line was sold to Lowell Stockmen of Chatsworth. The dealership retained the IH truck dealership.

In 1965, John Tredennick of Pontiac assumed active management of K&S Sales Inc. in Fairbury. This company was the authorized dealer for Mercury and Comet Automobiles as well as International Harvester trucks. Tredennick had been a member of the mechanical department at the business since 1960. John Tredennick recounted to the Blade newspaper that he confessed to being in the garage business since he was in the Seventh Grade.

Six years later, in 1971, John Tredennick purchased the dealership. In 1975, son David Tredennick joined the firm as the Service Manager. Also, in 1975, Lydia Wiedman, the first wife of John Wiedman, died at the age of 80.

In 1976, the K&S Motor Sales building burned. The building was rebuilt, and the firm moved into the new building in 1977.

In 1980, company founder John Wiedman married Lydia Bachtold Maier. In 1986, John Wiedman died at the age of 84. He last lived at 402 Wanda Lane in Fairbury. John left an estate of \$750,000. This amount would be equivalent to \$1.79 million in today's dollars. His will stipulated that 58 percent of his estate be given to nine different Apostolic Christian charities. John Wiedman bequeathed the remaining 42 percent of his estate to his 28 nieces and nephews.

Following years of financial and economic decline, International Harvester began selling its separate equipment divisions, starting with the sale of the construction division to Dresser Industries in 1982. In November 1984, IH finalized a deal with Tenneco to sell the farm equipment division to Tenneco's subsidiary Case Corporation. The brand continues as Case IH, which Fiat owns. The European division exists today as McCormick Tractors and is owned by ARGO SpA of Italy. International Harvester became a truck and engine manufacturer solely and reorganized as Navistar International in 1986. Throughout its existence, International Harvester was headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. In 2020 Volkswagen agreed to purchase the remaining shares of Navistar fully.

In 1991, Dave and Kitty Tredennick purchased the K&S dealership. Also, in 1991, Albert Stoller died in Bloomington at the age of 86.

Esther Koehl, the wife of Dick Koehl, died in 2016 at the age of 87. John Tredennick also died in 2016 at the age of 88. Dick Koehl passed away in 2020 at the age of 96.

When Jim Paternoster decided to close his Ford dealership a few years ago, K&S became the designated Fairbury Ford dealer. K&S Ford has had a fascinating business journey starting as an International Harvester agricultural equipment dealer and evolving into a well-respected Ford automotive dealer.



K&S Sales facility in 1967



K&S in 2021



## **CHAPTER 69**

### **Fairbury's J. I. Case Dealer**

Back in the 1950s, Fairbury had six different agricultural implement dealers. The story of the J. I. Case dealer began with the birth of Joseph Smith Leman Jr. in 1835 in Alsace, France. He was the son of Joseph Leman Sr. (1802-1837) and Catherine Belsley (1811-1887). Unfortunately, Joseph Leman Sr. died when his son was just two years old in 1837. Joseph Leman Jr.'s mother was just 26 years old when her husband died.

In 1853, Joseph Leman Jr. was 18, and his mother was 42 years of age. They emigrated to the Metamora, Illinois, area from France. The ocean passage across the Atlantic took three weeks. The sailors on their ship warned them not to die on the journey because their bodies would be thrown overboard for the sharks to eat.

When Joseph Leman Jr. was 23 years of age, he married Katherina Smith in 1859. She was a member of the Mennonite church and was born in 1840. Joseph and Katherina Leman had 16 children. They had nine boys and seven girls. Each winter, Joseph Leman Jr. would dam up the creek that ran through his farm. After the first significant cold spell, ice would form with a thickness of 10 to 12 inches on the water behind the dam. He would cut the ice and store it in sawdust in their ice house. Joseph's ice house had thick wood double walls and a thick roof to keep out the heat from the sunlight. Joseph's grandchildren enjoyed visiting their grandfather and taking home a large chunk of ice for their kitchen icebox.

One of the 16 children born to Joseph and Katherina Smith was Benjamin Leman, born in 1878. He married Caroline Anliker in 1901 in Metamora. Benjamin was 22 years old, and Katherina was 21 when they married. They had nine children. Benjamin and Katherina Leman lived in Metamora during their first three years of marriage. They then moved their family to a farm near Forrest. In 1947, he retired, and they moved to a new home in Forrest. Benjamin died in 1948 at the age of 70. Katherina died in 1968 at the age of 88.

One of nine children of Benjamin and Katherina Leman was Chris E. Leman, born in 1908 in Forrest. Chris Leman married Viola Marie Schneider. Chris was 28, and Viola was 26 years of age when they married in 1936. They had one child. In the 1940 Census, Chris reported that he was the owner of a garage and gas station.

Fairbury had two opera houses. The oldest opera house was on Locust Street, where Steidinger Meats is now located. That opera house was built in 1870. The other opera house was on Third Street, at the northeast corner of Third and Maple Streets.

In 1945, 37-year-old Chris Leman bought the old 1870 opera house from Mrs. Nellie Eddy on Locust Street. A Blade article noted that Chris Leman was the manager of the Farmer's Implement Company. Mr. Leman told the Blade he did not have a specific plan for the building. The building was one of the oldest in Fairbury and was 75 years old.

A short time later, the old opera house became the main building for the Farmer's Implement Company of Fairbury. Many current citizens remember the distinctive Case corporate logo on each side of the main entrance door. This logo was an eagle perched on top of planet Earth. In 1946, Chris Leman ran an employment ad in the Pantagraph looking for an experienced mechanic and welder to work at his business in Fairbury.

Also, in 1946, the Farmer's Implement Company announced it was opening a new branch named Case Sales and Service in Pontiac. Chris E. Leman was manager for both the Fairbury and Pontiac stores.

During World War II, most factories switched from making consumer goods to military equipment. Repair parts for agricultural equipment were very hard to find during the war. In 1948, the firm ran a Blade ad reporting the firm now had repair parts and could now repair their customer's equipment.

In 1951, the Blade reported that Sam Slagel had been appointed by the Case Tractor and Implement Company as the new manager of the Farmer's Implement Company in Fairbury. The previous manager, Joe Francis, continued to be employed at the firm.

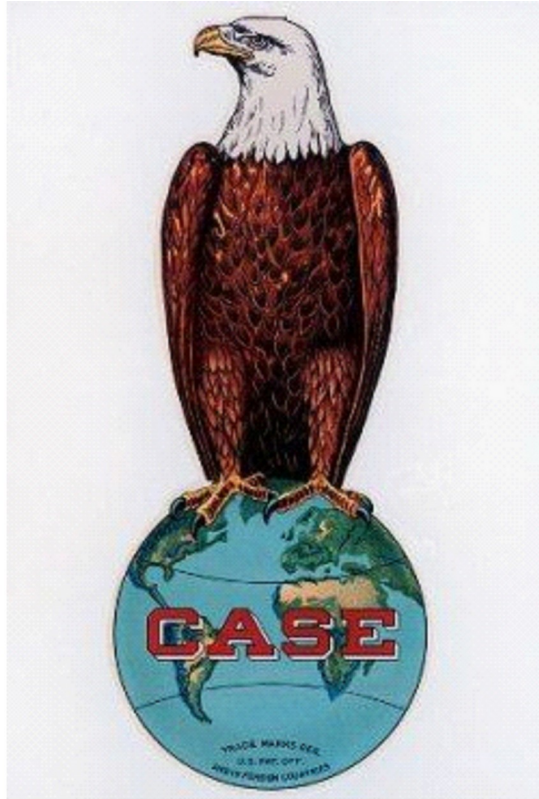
After just six years of operation, the branch store in Pontiac was closed in 1952. Mr. Leman sold all of the inventory and tools at a public auction.

In early 1953, Hartzel Cox took over as the Farmer's Implement Company manager in Fairbury for ten months. Chris E. Leman resumed the role of manager after Mr. Cox left that position.

At some point, the business moved from the old Opera House location on Locust Street to a new facility on Route 24 east of Fairbury. This location is where Sam Walter & Son is now located. In 1965, the Farmer's Implement Company announced they had sold their facility and business on east Route 24 to Sam Walter & Sons. Chris Leman thanked his past customers for their business. He retired and moved to Sarasota, Florida, in 1977. Chris Leman died at the age of 75 in 1983 in Sarasota. Chris's wife Viola died in 2000 at the age of 90 in Peoria.

J. I. Case's corporate entities and brands repeatedly changed in the 1980s and 1990s. When its corporate parent, Tenneco, bought International Harvester's agricultural equipment division and merged it into Case, the J. I. Case Company continued, but it began using the Case IH brand. In the 1990s, it changed names several more times (each name including "Case") before its merger into CNH Global ended its history as a distinct entity. Various CNH brands continue to use the Case name, such as Case CE and Case IH.

Farmer's Implement Company was the Fairbury Case dealer from about 1946 until 1965. The current location of the two Case corporate "Eagle" signs is unknown. These logos often sell for over \$10,000 each in the collector market.



Distinctive Case Corporate logo used by  
Fairbury Case Dealer

## **CHAPTER 70**

### **Blade Celebrates 150th Birthday**

Fairbury was founded in 1857 when the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria to the Indiana border. Four years after the town was founded, the Civil War broke out in 1861. Many of the men living in the Fairbury area enlisted in the Union Army. Fairbury was so deserted during the war that part of Locust Street was converted to a wheat field.

The Civil War ended in April of 1865 when General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. The Chicago Tribune chronicled the creation of Fairbury's first newspaper in its August 1865 issue. The Tribune reported that a new Republican paper had been started at Fairbury in Livingston County by J. S. Harper, and it was named the Intelligencer. Unfortunately, this newspaper only lasted about one year.

In 1866, H. S. Decker started the Journal newspaper and then quickly sold it to I. P. McDowell. The paper was then sold to Otis Eastman in 1867.

Brothers Othello Jenks Dimmick and Laurence W. Dimmick started a new Fairbury newspaper called the Independent in 1871. Fairbury had two newspapers until 1873 when the Journal went out of business. This change left the Independent as the only newspaper.

Fairbury returned to having two newspapers in 1876 when Charles B. Holmes started the Blade. In that era, Fairbury was experiencing a town feud. The opposing factions were the West-Enders associated with John Marsh and the East-Enders aligned with Bruce Amsbury. The Independent newspaper associated itself with the East-Enders, and the Blade represented the West-Enders.

The city feud degenerated to the point where the two sides set fire to their opponent's business buildings. Fairbury had so many fires that insurance companies raised their annual premiums to five percent of the building's value compared to less than one percent rates today. As a result, few business owners could afford fire insurance.

In the wake of the feud and the promise of unification, J. S. Scibird of Bloomington bought out both *The Blade* and the *Independent* and merged them into a new journal, the *Independent Blade*, based on the principle that in unity, there is strength.

Scibird was a man of vigorous courage, with a workable knowledge of grammar, a fair vocabulary, and a crusading spirit. He immediately embarked upon a campaign to rid Fairbury of the moral menace of prostitution. By 1875, the city clerk had registered over 30 such houses of "ill repute." Scibird received support from the clergy and most of the inhabitants of Fairbury for his crusade. Within three years, he had driven the businesses to move to more appreciative locations where there was no "hounding" newspaper.

Scibird was assisted by his son Edward, and they developed their paper into a readable journal which soon gained the respect and admiration of the Fairbury residents. In 1881, the senior Scibird died, and Ed continued the paper briefly until a buyer could be found. C. E. Carter purchased the paper and changed the name from the *Independent Blade* to the *Blade*.

Mr. Carter grew tired of being tied to his job and decided that the best way to run his paper was by hiring editors and controlling the *Blade* from a distance. Thus, began 13 years of mediocrity as the *Blade* saw a rapid procession of editors. Among them were A. I. Baker in 1887, T. E. DuBois in 1888, D. A. Fraley in 1892, and the combination of Shankland and Price in 1894. In 1896, the *Blade* finally found a dedicated man in the person of Newt Fulton.

During this unfortunate journalism period in Fairbury, when Carter owned the paper, a second paper, the *Local Record*, was established. Newt Fulton had been the foreman of the "*Record*" before buying into the *Blade*. Once Fulton starting running the *Blade*, the townspeople realigned behind the *Blade* to support it once again. After Fulton's switch, the "*Record*" slowly drifted into oblivion.

In 1899, J. Sutton was taken on as a partner at the *Blade*. In 1901, James Patterson took the lowest level job at the newspaper, the "printer's devil." His assignment was to clean the messy printing presses and perform other odd jobs. Starting at the bottom, Patterson worked his way up to buy

Fulton's half of the newspaper when Fulton retired. Patterson worked 53 years at the Blade and became the editor and handled the Blade management, with Sutton remaining as his partner. When Sutton retired, Frank Phelps, Cora Evans, and L. L. Harris purchased his share of the paper. This proprietorship continued until the sale of the newspaper in 1954 to Donovan Kramer.

During Patterson's period of control, the paper attained a circulation of approximately 3,000 readers. This circulation level is excellent considering the population of Fairbury never exceeded 2,500 to 3,000 people in that era.

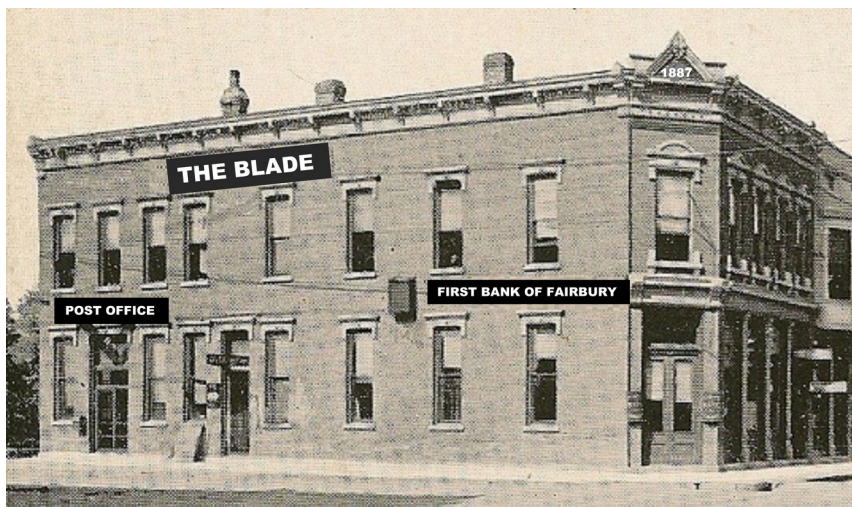
Under Don Kramer, the Blade continued its steady upward climb in quality until it reached the much-coveted rating of best weekly or semi-weekly in the State of Illinois. This honor, the Will Loomis Trophy, was awarded to The Blade in 1960 by the Illinois Press Association.

Kramer sold his paper in 1962 to James Roberts. Under the management of Jim Roberts, the journal won awards for 2nd best photography, 3rd best feature story, and an honorable mention for advertising excellence. 1963 brought four more prizes into the Blade's fold; 2nd best typography and makeup, honorable mention for advertising excellence, general excellence, and best original column.

Jim Roberts lived in Fairbury and was very active in the community. After 28 years of owning the Blade, Jim sold the Blade and retired in 1990. He died in 2006 at the age of 84.

Since 1990, the Blade has had many different owners. In 2019, the newspaper was owned by the GateHouse Media chain. That year, Gatehouse acquired the Gannett chain that publishes USA Today. The name of the merged firm is Gannett.

The Blade traces back 150 years to the Independent newspaper started by the Dimmick brothers back in 1871. The paper continues to document the history of the Fairbury area in the 21st Century.



The Blade, the Post Office, and the bank were located in the building at the southwest corner of Third and Locust Streets circa 1890



## **CHAPTER 71**

### **Second Largest Fairbury Greenhouse**

Around 1910, Fairbury had four different greenhouses selling flowers and plants. The largest was the Kring Greenhouse, located on 7th Street west of the Prairie Central High School. The Sheaf Greenhouse was on the west side of Fairbury. Two half-brothers each operated separate greenhouses. John Milne & Son Greenhouse was located about three blocks west of the Kring Greenhouse. The Alexander Milne Greenhouse was located on North First Street. Eventually, Alexander Milne bought out both the John Milne & Son Greenhouse and the Sheaf Greenhouse. He dismantled the two greenhouses and used the glass to expand his operation on north First Street. The Milne and Kring greenhouses were the only two florists in Fairbury for many years.

The story of the Milne family began with Alexander George Milne (1800-1859) in Aberdeen, Scotland. He married Eliza Isabella Torrie (1805-1842) in Aberdeen. Alexander and Eliza Milne had two girls and one boy. Son John Milne was born in 1840 in Aberdeen. His mother, Eliza Torrie, died when John was just two years old. John's father, Alexander George Milne, married for the second time to Marjory May Dow. A. G. Milne and Marjory had four girls and one boy. Their son, Alexander George Milne Jr., was born in 1856 in Aberdeen. Alexander George Milne Jr. was 16 years younger than his half-brother John Milne.

Thirty-two-year-old John Milne married 26-year-old Sarah Jane Stubbings in 1872 in London, England. After their marriage, John and Sarah Milne emigrated from London to Chicago. John Milne had learned the florist trade when he grew up in Scotland and continued as a florist in Chicago.

The first child of John and Sarah Milne was born in 1873 in Chicago and was named George Alexander Milne. Also, in 1873, John's half-brother, Alexander George Milne Jr., emigrated from Scotland to Chicago when he was 17 years of age. A. G. Milne Jr. had also learned the florist trade while living in Scotland. A. G. Milne Jr. entered the florist trade in Chicago and marketed garden products for ten years.

While living in Chicago, John and Sarah Milne had a baby girl they named Hilda Milne. Unfortunately, Hilda died when she was just six years old. This left son George Alexander Milne as their only child.

In 1884, at the age of 28, A. G. Milne Jr. married Elsie Rae McKenzie in Chicago. She was 24 years old and was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. While A. G. and Elsie Milne were living in Chicago, they had four children. Agnes and May Gordon Milne were both born in 1886 in Chicago. Alexander G. Milne was born in 1888 and Elsie Milne was born in 1890. The nickname of son A. G. Milne born in 1888, was Jerry Milne. He likely had this nickname to avoid confusion because his father and grandfather had the same name.

In 1889, John Milne moved his family from Chicago to Fairbury. He purchased the Remington house on East Hickory Street. John and Sarah lived in the same house until they died. John Milne, along with his 16-year-old son Alexander George Milne, established the florist business of John Milne & Sons in Fairbury.

One year after his half-brother, John Milne, moved from Chicago to Fairbury, Alexander George Milne Jr. and his family moved to Fairbury. A. G. Milne Jr. bought land and a small greenhouse from David Smith on north First Street. Fairbury's four florist businesses now included Sheaf Greenhouse, Kring Bros., John Milne & Son, and the Alex Milne Greenhouse.

The 1892 to 1894 period was a tragic one for the A. G. Milne Jr. family. Son John Milne was born in 1892 in Fairbury. Unfortunately, in 1892, six-year-old daughter Agnes Milne and two-year-old daughter Elsie Milne passed away. In 1893, ten-month-old son John Milne died. In 1894, son Roy Milne also died at ten months of age. The A. G. Milne Jr. family lost four children in two years. In 1898, the last child of A. G. and Elsie Milne named Thomas Walter Milne was born.

In 1893, the Blade reported that John Milne & Son was building a new greenhouse on lots north of Fairbury. In the 1898 business directory, Fairbury had three florist and gardener businesses. These three were Alex Milne, John Milne & Son, and Kring Bros.

In 1900, the Blade reported that 27-year-old George Milne had an accident at the John Milne & Son facility. Their greenhouse had a windmill to provide water for the plants. The brake on the windmill stuck, and George climbed the 60-foot high tower to repair it. George had an accident, and Dr. Otis had to amputate one of his fingers that got stuck in the mechanism.

John Milne continued to operate his greenhouse with his son George Milne until he retired in 1914 when he was 74 years old. John sold his greenhouse to his half-brother, A. G. Milne. John Milne's wife, Sarah Milne, died in 1917 at the age of 71. John Milne died in 1929 at the age of 89.

The Alex Milne greenhouse continued its operations. They expanded their greenhouses using the glass from the John Milne & Son greenhouse and the J. S. Sheaf Greenhouse they bought out in 1921.

In 1918, Jerry Milne served in World War I. He was released from the military in 1919 and married Rosemond "Tillie" Nussbaum. They had four children, including Joan Louise Milne, Margaret Jean Milne, and Jack Gordon Milne.

In 1920, Thomas Milne married Edna G. Hair. They had no children. In 1937, A. G. Milne died in Fairbury at the age of 81. His wife, Elsie Milne, died in 1950 at the age of 90. Sons Jerry Milne and Thomas Milne continued to operate the greenhouse until Jerry retired in 1964. Jerry Milne died in 1966 at the age of 77.

In 1966, Keith and Sarah Stiver bought 1.5 acres from Thomas Milne and the estate of Jerry Milne to build their new ranch-style funeral home on North First Street. After the Milne greenhouse had been sitting unused for three years, Louis and Katie Kaisner purchased it in 1969. They operated the business until it was closed in 1980. In 1985, Thomas Milne died at the age of 86. The Milne family provided florist services for over seven decades to many Fairbury citizens.



Circa 1894 family photo of Alexander George Milne, Jerry Milne,  
Elsie Ray Milne, and Mae Milne

## **CHAPTER 72**

### **Mystery Couple Wedding Very Popular in 1933**

In 1933, one of the primary forms of entertainment in Fairbury was movies and events held at the Opera House on Third Street. This building was half of a block north of the old City Hall and was named the Central Theatre in 1933. The manager of the Central Theatre was always trying to think of special events which could draw more patrons to attend the business.

The manager dreamed up the idea of having a mystery couple get married on the stage of the Central Theatre. The manager ran several successive ads in the Blade announcing the event to build interest in the special occasion. He lined up local Fairbury business people to advertise their business by donating wedding gifts to the couple.

The maiden name of the bride was Nellie Stanley. Her life story began with the birth of James Franklin Hayden in 1861 in Hardin County, Illinois. This county is just 50 miles north of Paducah, Kentucky. Also, in 1861, Madora Ann Wiseman was born just south of Louisville, Kentucky. In 1882, James F. Hayden married Madora Wiseman. Both of them were 20 years old when they married. James and Madora Hayden settled in Louisville, Kentucky.

In the 1900 Census, the James and Madora Hayden family was living in Louisville, Kentucky. James Hayden was employed as a hostler. A hostler was a man hired to look after the horses of people staying at an inn. Living with James Hayden was his wife Madora and eight children ranging in age from two to seventeen.

By 1920, James Hayden, age 62, had separated from his wife and became a farmer in Fancy Farm, Kentucky, about 250 miles west of Louisville. His youngest child was 23 years old, so all the children had become adults. James Hayden married Nellie Stanley in Fulton County, Georgia. She was born in 1891 and was 29 years old when she married 62-year-old James Hayden. They had four children.

In 1926, Madora Hayden, the first wife of James Hayden, died at the age of 65 in Louisville, Kentucky.

In early 1928, James and Nellie Hayden had their fourth child. Unfortunately, a few months later, James Hayden died in Indiana at the age of 67. Nellie Hayden became a 36-year-old widow with four children under the age of seven to raise.

In 1929, the Great Depression began. There were very few government "safety net" programs to support young widows with children in that era. In the 1930 Census, Mrs. Nellie Hayden had become an inmate at the McCracken County Sanatorium and County Farm in Kentucky. It is unknown what happened to her four children while she was at the County Farm.

The life story of the groom in the Fairbury Central Theatre wedding began with the birth of Sadie Robinson in Washington County, Illinois. This county is 120 miles north of Paducah, Kentucky.

Martin Hacker was born in 1871 in St. Clair County, Illinois. This county is southwest of St. Louis. In 1898, twenty-one-year-old Martin Hacker married 26-year-old Sadie Robinson in St. Clair County. Martin and Sadie Hacker had four children.

In the 1910 Census, Martin Hacker was a 33-year-old coal miner in St. Clair County. His wife and three children were living with him. The Hacker family then moved to Forrest, Illinois, by 1920. Martin Hacker opened a grocery store in Strawn. His wife Sadie and three children were living with him in the 1920 Census.

By the 1930 Census, Martin had separated from his wife, Sadie. Their children were grown, and Martin operated his Strawn grocery store. He boarded with the William and Minervia Crews family in their home.

The village of Strawn was the scene of an armed robbery in December of 1930. Four young men from Bloomington were armed with shotguns and robbed Martin Hacker's grocery store. Mr. F. W. Garrison shot at the escaping thieves and mortally wounded 19-year-old Charles Fancher. The subsequent police investigation resulted in eight young people, including

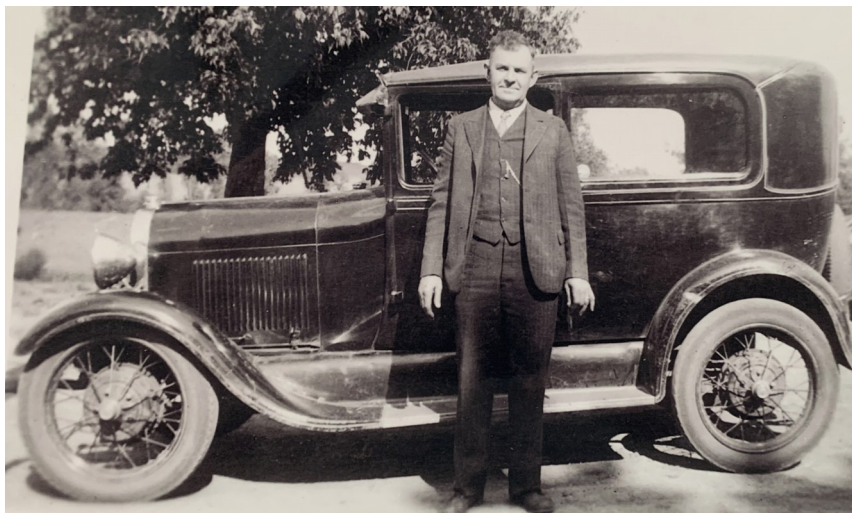
two women, being arrested in Bloomington. The thieves also stole Horace Goembel's automobile in Fairbury earlier in the evening of the Strawn robbery. Many other stolen goods from other robberies were found as part of the investigation.

By 1933, Mrs. Nellie Hayden was 42 years old. She had lost her husband five years earlier, and she had to care for four children between the ages of four and twelve. She moved to the Forrest area. Martin Hacker was 56 years old and had separated from his first wife. He owned and operated a grocery store in Strawn. In 1933, Nellie and Martin decided to marry and become the "mystery couple" for the Fairbury Central Theatre wedding.

Dwight attorney Clyde Thompson conducted the wedding ceremony at the Central Theatre. Twenty-three different Fairbury merchants donated wedding gifts to the newlyweds. The most significant contribution was a new 1933 Chevrolet provided by the Fairbury Auto Company. All of the wedding dresses, wedding rings, flowers, and wedding photos were also donated by Fairbury businesses. Dessert for the newlyweds' first meal at home was Illinois Valley Ice Cream donated by the Grey Goose Confectionary.

Seven years after the 1933 marriage at the Central Theatre, the Martin Hacker family lived in Forrest. Martin and Nellie Hacker had one child together, Rose Anna Hacker. The four children from Nellie's first marriage were also living with the family. Martin Hacker lived to be 82 years old and died in 1959. Nellie Hacker lived until the age of 90 and died in 1982 in Forrest.

The citizens of Fairbury enjoyed the publicity stunt of a "mystery wedding" conceived by the Central Theatre manager. Martin and Nellie Hacker had one of the most unique weddings ever conducted in Fairbury history.



Martin Hacker on his wedding day with his 1933 Chevrolet  
wedding gift from Fairbury Auto



## **CHAPTER 73**

### **History of the Apostolic Christian Church**

The origins of the Apostolic Christian Church all trace back to Samuel Heinrich Froelich (1803-1857). Samuel was born to religious parents who were descendants of the French Huguenots (a Calvinistic Protestant movement in France), living in Brugg, Switzerland. They named their son Samuel and dedicated their infant to the ministry in a church ceremony in the local Swiss Reformed Church, where his father was employed as a Sexton. It would seem that this set the course for his life to come, though probably not as his parents would have imagined.

When Samuel reached age 17, he went off to the University of Zurich to begin training as a pastor in the state church. After finishing his studies at Zurich, Samuel transferred to the then-new University of Basel for the remainder of his theological training.

In that era, Switzerland had an official government church. During his theological studies, he developed a different viewpoint than the official government church doctrine. When Froehlich completed his studies, he found it very difficult to get a job in the state church because his approach did not follow the government church guidelines. In 1830, he was appointed as the vicar of an ailing, poorly attended church in Leutwil. Undeterred by his appointment, he proceeded to preach using his viewpoint. Very quickly, the church was filled to overflowing with nearly 2,000 people, many from neighboring parishes. A great awakening had begun in the once nearly-dead church.

Then in 1830, the state church introduced a new catechism (formal religious instruction for children and adults). The new catechism conflicted with what Froehlich had been taught while in seminary. He refused to use the new catechism. Froehlich had already angered many of his peers because of his unconventional preaching methods. His great success also angered his peers. Many people abandoned their home churches to attend Froehlich's church. Consequently, his peers eagerly took advantage of this opportunity and notified his superiors of his refusal to use the new

catechism. As a result, Froehlich was dismissed from his post and banned from ever preaching in a state church again.

Undaunted by being kicked out of the official Swiss church, he became a missionary and preached using his own approach. Although he successfully attracted a large number of followers, he was also kicked out of several successive towns. Froelich named his church the Evangelical Baptist Church.

In 1847, the sizable Amish congregation in Lewis County, New York, had a religious crisis. One man in the congregation stated that he knew a man who was knowledgeable about the issues that were dividing them and thought he might be able to end their confusion. He said the man was Samuel Froehlich of Switzerland. This man had earlier been baptized into Froehlich's fledgling church in Switzerland, but for some reason, he ended up in an Amish congregation that later emigrated to America from the Alsace-Lorraine area of Europe. The ministers agreed to ask Froehlich or one of his representatives to visit their church.

Upon receipt of their letter, Samuel Froehlich decided not to visit America himself. Instead, his new church immediately ordained Benedict Weyeneth for this mission and sent him to America. Benedict Weyeneth was born in 1819 in Switzerland. He was a believer in Samuel Froehlich's church methodologies.

After arriving in New York, Weyeneth attended church services with the confused congregation. After church services, Weyeneth talked privately with many of the church members about Froehlich's teachings. Very quickly, 75% of the congregation left the Amish congregation and converted to the new Evangelical Baptist faith. A total of five ministers, including at least one bishop, also joined the new church.

1847, Weyeneth returned to Europe for a while. On November 20, 1850, he married Elizabeth Blunier, daughter of Casper and Elizabeth Schoental Blunier of Trub, Bern, Switzerland. He and his bride returned to settle in America in 1851. They successively lived in New York, Ohio, Iowa, and Peoria. In 1857, Weyeneth finally decided to settle in rural Roanoke, Illinois, permanently.

Very quickly, new churches developed in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and other states. In 1984, Perry A. Klopfenstein published his book titled *March to Zion*. In his book, Klopfenstein details when and how each new church developed in the United States.

Benjamin Nussbaum wrote two pamphlets about the history of the Apostolic Church. In 1973 he wrote his *South Side history*, and in 1975 he wrote his *North Side History*. Nussbaum recounted the North Side church began with Joseph Virkler. He was both an Elder and Minister. In 1864, he and his family moved from New York to a farm north of Forrest, Illinois.

As more families arrived in the area, Virkler started conducting church services in local homes. Around 1870, a small two-room church was built on Virkler's land. The family names of some of the first members were Abersol, Honegger, Huber, Keller, Leuthold, Metz, Ramseyer, Scharlach, Stoller, and Schwartzentraub.

As more families settled in the Fairbury area, attending the church north of Forrest using horse-drawn wagons or buggies became a challenging trip. When there were enough Fairbury members, they built their own South Side church building in 1875. Some of the family names of those early members included Bittner, Farney, Gerber, Hari, Hartman, Hosterwitz, Nussbaum, Roth, Slagle, Sohn, Sommer, Steffen, Wenger, Yoder, Ziegenhorn, and Zimmerman.

Benedict Weyeneth died in Roanoke in 1887. He has descendants throughout the Central Illinois area. In 1917, the national church organization was officially named the Apostolic Christian Churches of America. The first North and South Side Fairbury churches expanded over time and constructed more significant church buildings. Additional information about how our area churches further evolved can be found in Ben Nussbaum's *North and South Side church pamphlets*. The Fairbury area Apostolic Christian church members have been a vital part of the success of the Fairbury community.



Samuel Froehlich (1803-1857), Swiss founder of the  
Apostolic Church

## **CHAPTER 74**

### **1921 Fairbury Movie**

The first known movie to be made in Fairbury was back in 1921. The whole town became very excited when the Central Opera House announced they were having a movie made using all local acting talent.

In the early 1900s, there was no radio, television, or Internet. Fairbury citizens were entertained by theatrical plays, bands, movies, roller skating, basketball games, and guest orators' speeches. There were also high school plays and graduations. All of these events required a large building.

In 1904, the Central Opera House was built at the southeast corner of Third and Maple Streets. The massive new building was constructed at the cost of \$20,000. This amount would be equivalent to \$564,000 in today's dollars. This Third Street opera house was located where the Busey Bank now stands. From an architectural design point of view, this was one of the most elegant buildings ever built in Fairbury. The first manager of this opera house was Phil Wade.

The decade of the 1920s was one of the most prosperous in American history. Today, we call this decade the Roaring Twenties. In that era, people had the money for entertainment, including going to the Opera House. Every town of any significant size had an opera house or theatre.

In 1919, the Alcru Theatre Company was formed in Paxton, Illinois. Mr. Algers and Mr. Cruzen were two of the principal owners of this firm. They decided to build a new theatre in Paxton. The two men also decided to expand and buy or build theatres in other Central Illinois towns. Their first project was to create a new theater in Paxton with a seating capacity of 800 people. They also included a parlor for the ladies and a smoking room for the men.

Howard Stuckey was a member of the Class of 1919 at Fairbury Township High School. He won an award for a woodworking project he competed in high school shop class. Another young Fairbury woman attending high school at this time was Erma Fitzgerald. She was born in 1900 in Belle

Prairie Township to Charles Fitzgerald and Della Spangler. Because Erma was such a good student, she did not have to take final exams in four different subjects. One of Erma's fellow students in the Class of 1920 was Don Karnes. Mr. Karnes became a football and basketball star at the University of Illinois and became the youngest college coach in the nation at ISU.

In early 1920, the Alcru Theatre Company bought Fairbury's Opera House from owner C. E. Ward. The new owners added two new Simplex motion picture machines and kept the Opera House open six days a week.

Elmer Blaine Ramsey (1892-1973) was the son of Hiel Johnson Ramsey and Sarah Isabel McDowell. Sarah McDowell was the granddaughter of Fairbury pioneer settler William McDowell (1785-1834). Mr. McDowell arrived in the Fairbury area in 1832, and he was a veteran of the War of 1812.

In May of 1920, Elmer Ramsey lived in Gibson City, and he owned the Federal Bakery. Elmer accepted a new job of running the Fairbury Opera House for the Alcru Theatre. He subsequently moved back to his hometown of Fairbury. He leased his bakery to the baker, Mr. Dougherty. Elmer Ramsey was 28 years old.

In August of 1920, Elmer Ramsey and Mr. E. E. Alger of Paxton expanded the Alcru Theatre company by purchasing the Royal Theatre in Minonk, Illinois.

Elmer Ramsey and the Alcru Theatre owners came up with several ideas for increasing attendance at their theatres. One of these ideas was to hire a film crew to make a film in each town where they had a theater. They would run a contest to determine the most popular young lady in each city. The winning young lady would receive a \$25 prize, and she selected the rest of the cast members for the film. Each film would include many local residents, houses, and storefronts. The resultant films were extremely popular because of the local people and scenes in the movie. Their first movie was filmed in Gilman and Paxton. This movie played to packed houses in their Paxton theater.

Alcru Theatre company decided they would make the second movie in Fairbury. After several weeks of voting, Miss Erma Fitzgerald won the contest with 6,120 votes. Miss Irene Connors received 5,940 votes, Miss Ann Heddan received 5,235 votes, and Miss Jessie Hoker received 2,435 votes.

Mr. M. G. Flynn of the California Motion Picture company filmed for two weeks in Fairbury. He shot 1,500 feet of film, including scenes in Fairbury houses, on Fairbury streets, and in Fairbury stores. The Blade noted this film would be of great historical value in future years because it depicted typical life in 1921 in Fairbury. The title of the movie was "The Waif."

Cast members of the Fairbury movie were Erma Fitzgerald, Dean Vorhees, Mrs. L. S. Henderson, Marion Alvine Ramsey, Mrs. J. A. Carter, Mrs. Levi Troehler, Irene Eddy, Katherine Connors, John Henderson, Custis Weeks, Van Powers, Nathan Powers, Paul Ward, Edward Zook, Tom Hollingsworth, W. W. Compton, Howard Stuckey, and W. D. Mundt.

After three delays, the movie played in May of 1921 to standing room only audiences. The Blade noted the local acting talent did an excellent job in the film.

A year after the film was produced, Erma Fitzgerald married Howard Stuckey. They had four children and lived most of their lives in Piper City. Erma Fitzgerald died in 1998 at the age of 97. Elmer Ramsey, theater manager, died in 1973 at the age of 80 in Fairbury.



Erma Fitzgerald won the popularity contest and starred in the 1921 Fairbury movie.



## **Recommended Reading**

*Stuffed Clubs and Antimacassars* by Alma Lewis James.

Other Fairbury History Books by Dale C. Maley.....

*The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois*

*Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War*

*Fairbury, Illinois, in the World Wars*

*Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois*

*Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors*

*Fairbury, Illinois in 1888*

*Fairbury, Illinois, from Prehistoric to Modern Times*

*Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Columbian Exposition*

*William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois*

*William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields*



## Author Spotlight



### **Dale C. Maley**

Dale C. Maley is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and Vice-President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Dale is an expert on Fairbury, Illinois, history and has written over 120 newspaper articles and more than 20 books about Fairbury history. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

## **Also by Dale C. Maley**

### **Fairbury and Livingston County History Books**

- Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
- Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
- Fairbury History Stories Volume 1
- Fairbury, Illinois from Prehistoric to Modern Times
- Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
- Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
- Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
- Franklin Oliver: Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
- History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
- Honegger's & Co. of Fairbury, Illinois
- Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Years with Updates
- The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
- The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Goudy Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
- The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
- The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois

- Walton Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois
- William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields

### **Woodworking Books**

- How to Build a Fascinating Ratcheting Wood Model
- How to Make a Simple Hopping Bunny Rabbit Pull-Toy

## **Investing Books**

- Index Mutual Funds: How to Simplify Your Financial Life and Beat the Pro's
- How Asset Allocation Can Help You Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers about ETF's and Index Funds
- Why We Don't Save Enough for Retirement and How You Can Save More
- Are You Using the Right Rules to Plan Your Retirement?
- How to Use Psychology to Achieve Your Financial Goals
- Should Immediate Annuities Be a Tool in Your Retirement Planning Toolbox?
- Who Wins the Variable Annuity Versus Mutual Fund Battle?
- Will Your Children or Uncle Sam Inherit Your Estate?
- What Are the Requirements for Becoming a Financial Planner?
- Sell My Stocks Before the Baby Boomers Crash the Market?
- How Do I Determine If I Have Saved Enough to Retire?
- Don't Max Out My 401K?
- Will Reverse Mortgages Be the Salvation of Baby Boomer Retirees?

- Do I Need Ten, Twenty, or Thirty Times My Income to Retire?
- How to Find a Good Financial Planner
- Total Market or Slice-n-Dice for My Investment Portfolio?
- What Safety Factor Are You Using for Your Retirement Plan?
- How Much Income Do I Really Need in Retirement?
- What Lessons Can We Learn from the Crash of 2008?
- How to Invest for Retirement after the Crash of 2008
- Rules-of-thumb or Retirement Planning Software?
- Is Portfolio Rebalancing Worth It?
- Do I Need Umbrella Insurance?
- Got My First Job and How Do I Handle the 401K?
- Are Black Swans Really Harmful to Ordinary Investors?
- Should My Asset Allocation Include My Pension and Social Security?
- Should I Pay Off My Mortgage Early?
- How Does My Asset Allocation Compare to Everyone Else?
- How Do I Maximize Retirement Income From My Portfolio?
- Is Saving 10% of My Gross Income Good Enough?

- Contribute to My Bad 401K or Go Taxable?
- Do I Need an Investment Policy Statement?
- Do I Need Long-Term Care Insurance?
- Do I Need Long-Term Disability Insurance?
- How to Read Your Way to Financial Wealth
- How Do I Select the Correct Risk Level for My Portfolio?
- How Do I Estimate Retirement Living Expenses?